

Following Footsteps: Finding Myself in Europe

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract:

My Honors thesis is a creative project, a travel memoir about my three experiences traveling to Europe and how I grew as an independent, young woman. My first international experience took place during March 2014 for a high school spring break trip to England, France, and Spain. The second trip occurred in May 2016 when I traveled to Italy with my HONR 390 class for a field study in Rome and Florence. For my third trip, I spent three weeks in England during June 2017 to participate in the Shakespeare's Globe Education Program. Using the motif of following in people's footsteps, I describe my growth as a traveler, a preservice teacher, and an independent adult.

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Process Analysis

For my Honors thesis, I wanted to write a travel memoir about my three trips to Europe, specifically how those experiences contributed to my growth as an independent, young woman. I first traveled overseas in 2014, at age seventeen, for a span of eight days, when I visited England, France, and Spain with my high school's foreign language department. The second trip occurred in 2016, after my first year at Ball State University, at age nineteen, when my Honors colloquium class traveled to Italy for a two-week field study. My third trip occurred in 2017, when I was twenty years old, and consisted of studying abroad for the Shakespeare's Globe Education Program for three weeks, as part of my English and theatrical studies, along with one week's vacation in Ireland. My goal was to write a compelling work of creative nonfiction that demonstrates how I grew as a traveler and a person through each of my trips to Europe.

The purpose of my project is rooted in my passion for storytelling and traveling. I have loved storytelling my entire life and discovered my love for travel as a teenager. Throughout my studies as an English education major and theatre minor, I have analyzed and interpreted other people's stories. I wanted to write this thesis to tell my story, or rather this small portion of my story. I wanted to challenge myself to stretch my storytelling abilities beyond academic interpretations of classic novels and plays and my usual method of telling my own stories: colloquial conversations.

I found my idea, and my advisor, Professor Elizabeth Dalton, in January 2017. I began researching shortly after our first meeting through August 2017. I spent the Fall 2017 semester organizing my ideas for a narrative unified by a theme of following in people's footsteps and starting the drafting process. By March 2018, I had a completed first draft. From that point, I revised my thesis through the Fall 2018 semester. When I initially undertook this project, I

anticipated that I would be working on my thesis for nearly two years because I knew that I had a big idea and that I have always been a verbose writer.

My research process began by reading travel memoirs from a craft perspective to see how established authors have written about their travel experiences. I read seven travel memoirs, including Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* and Frances Mayes's *Under the Tuscan Sun*. My goal was to discern what I liked about their writing that I could potentially emulate in my memoir and to understand what elements of these authors' storytelling did not resonate with me. For example, while reading *Eat, Pray, Love* I admired the extra step Gilbert took in putting herself in a vulnerable place with her readers through the stories and feelings she shared that highlighted the less glamorous side of travel. I respected the added layer of authenticity this gave her work and wanted to be a brave writer who could include a similar level of authenticity in her own work.

In addition, I read six memoirs that were not necessarily written about travel but were memoirs in which I enjoyed the authors' storytelling, such as Jenny Lawson's *Let's Pretend This Never Happened* and Felicia Ricci's *Unnaturally Green*, and wanted to determine why I connected with their writing styles. For example, I enjoyed Lawson's portrayal of her younger self, particularly the humor she integrates while laughing at her mistakes. I wanted to employ a similar sense of humility as I explored my own mistakes and challenges. I felt it was important to share my triumphs and my pitfalls to provide a more holistic view of my younger selves' experiences and growth.

Another component of my research process was to reread the travel journals I wrote on each of my trips abroad to see how my thinking and worldview changed. My journals from high school were accounts of what happened each day, without much substance in terms of reflections

and analysis. In my Rome and Florence colloquium, Professor Dalton suggested that we write our journals for our older selves, what we would want to remember about our time in Italy and what we learned from our experience. When I went abroad for the third time, I journaled like I did in Italy because I found those journals were more insightful and beneficial for me than the ones I wrote in high school. I reread each of these journals to map out the stories I might include and looked for a unifying theme for my narrative. I searched for patterns in my stories across my three trips and found an overarching theme of following in people's footsteps.

I realized that on each of my trips abroad, I literally and figuratively followed others' footsteps through Europe. My reflections showed me the increased independence I gained through these trips. When I traveled to Europe in high school, I was hardly without a chaperone and certainly was not allowed to go somewhere alone. During my Italy field study, I was a more educated traveler and ventured off with my classmates without another adult leading the way. By my third trip abroad, I flew alone to London and Dublin and often ventured into the cities by myself. Through my reflections, I also discovered, whether I did it intentionally or not, I metaphorically followed the footsteps of the writers, artists, students, thinkers, and even characters who came before me. I discovered that following others helped me learn more about myself and how to forge my own path.

I began drafting my thesis in Fall 2017 by copying stories from my travel journal verbatim into a document. I knew that I wanted to quote myself directly, looking at my travel journals as primary sources, to show my younger self's thoughts. I found it useful to have the journal in a digital format to manipulate as I pleased. It was important for me as a writer to find my distinct voices as a seventeen-, nineteen-, and twenty-year-old person. From there, I wrote the drafts one trip at a time.

Throughout my college career, I have discovered that teachers always tell students to free write if they are unsure of where to begin or are plagued with writer's block. I have found that rather than waiting for writer's block, I prefer to preemptively free write an entire draft to make sure I get all my ideas on paper. After I free wrote a draft, I set it aside and later edited it to create well-constructed sentences. I discovered that being preoccupied with phrasing and grammar during the drafting stage tends to overshadow my ideas for the piece I am writing, and I think it is more difficult to remember the direction of an idea than to proofread for subject-verb agreement, for example. Once I cleaned up the draft, I read it again with a fresh perspective to assess if I was satisfied with the product. The final step I took before sending my drafts to Professor Dalton was to read my draft aloud to friends to hear how it sounded.

I previously mentioned that I admired the authors who bravely put themselves in a vulnerable position through their storytelling. After I started writing, I realized that simply putting any of my thoughts on paper for someone else to read puts me in a vulnerable place. So, I had even more admiration for those writers and challenged myself to share my true selves with readers from the moments I was thriving to the moments I was struggling. In every story I told, it was important to me that I sounded like myself. I wanted an authentic voice for each section because I was a different person during each of my trips. In my proposal, I wrote that I wanted to write myself as the protagonist of my own story in which I analyze how my travels taught me about myself in ways that I could not have learned at home.

I began the revising process by reading Professor Dalton's feedback for overall areas of improvement. One of my biggest struggles throughout the revising process was combating perfectionism. Accepting the fact that my first drafts were not perfect, and that they did not need to be perfect, was tougher than I anticipated. I think receiving this feedback was more

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challenging for me than usual because these essays were about my life, so I found it more difficult to distance myself from the work. But after I revised a draft, my confidence in my work increased.

It is important to me that I remain independent as a writer and make my own creative decisions, so I reread my first drafts and made changes on my own before directly addressing Professor Dalton's feedback. After making my changes, I compared them with Professor Dalton's suggestions and continued to revise. Once I finished my revisions for a trip, I searched through my pictures that would best supplement my prose and brainstormed captions.

One of my biggest obstacles, in terms of craft, was attempting to write concisely. I was not surprised that my drafts were quite long, as I have been exceeding the maximum range on my writing assignments for years. I had to learn how to discern which stories demonstrated my growth as I followed in others' footsteps, thus contributing to my overall narrative, and which stories strayed from that theme and should be eliminated. I also had to understand that if a story was not included in my memoir, that was not because the story was not important to me or did not help me in some way; it just did not align with the theme of following in people's footsteps to become an independent young adult.

Throughout the process of writing my thesis, I realized that my learning did not stop when my flights landed in the United States. My travels taught me that becoming more independent, more educated, more confident, etc., requires me to take control of my growth. Everyone travels for a purpose and travel alone does not change someone; the traveler has to play an active role in their growth. Even though I grew as an adult during my three trips to Europe, I am still figuring out how to view myself as an autonomous grown-up.

My thesis became an immersive writing project that helped me recognize how important it is to me to have my own creative voice. I learned how to use my voice to construct a narrative about myself and share my honest opinions of myself. My observations and reflections taught me about who I am as a creative person. As a teacher, I want to help my students understand the significance of finding and utilizing their own unique voices, and I believe completing this project has provided me with numerous insights to help achieve this goal. If I am to help adolescents discover who they are, I need to have a clear idea of who I am.

I learned how to face my many crises of confidence that arose when I thought I was not smart enough or a good enough writer. These crises of confidence are likely an ongoing battle that many creative people encounter. But I am stronger now that I took the challenge of putting myself in a vulnerable place by sharing my stories because I learned how to persevere and trust myself as a creator. Writing my thesis was a liberating experience. I learned how to manage the immense freedom that comes with directing one's own narrative and how to manage the responsibility I had to myself to tell my story as I saw fit.

EUROPE 2014

My White Vans

Countless people have written or said so many inspirational travel quotes about seeing the world, gaining new perspectives, and experiencing the beauty and culture of a new place. But there is something incredibly important that those people are not addressing: shoes. Now, you might be thinking that this memoir is going to be superficial and that it falls into a chick flick stereotype because you've perhaps inferred that I'm going to start my story by talking about my favorite pair of shoes. Well, don't worry; the shoes I'm going to talk about are not my favorite. My favorite pair of shoes are T-strap heels that look like they came straight from the 1940s, but they didn't help get me across Europe. My white Vans, on the other hand (or the other foot, I guess I should say), came straight from the 2010s and I did in fact wear them as I walked through Europe.

In my experience, if you aren't taking footwear into consideration when planning for travel, you will quickly find out that is a horrible mistake. Travel requires lots of walking and standing in lines, and I've learned from my past three trips abroad that I get irritated and miserable when my feet hurt. It's a type of pain that I will do everything in my power to avoid. I don't want to be unable to see and do the things I want because it hurts to walk there. Needless to say, wearing the right shoes to travel in is at the top of my list of important travel rules to abide by. It's right below always making sure I go to the bathroom before I leave the house. I'm sure most people who have ever been in charge of a toddler already know this, but a quick review never hurt anyone. If you're thinking that you can discount my shoe rule, you clearly haven't tried to navigate cobblestones in heels before. I wouldn't recommend it; it's not pretty or graceful. And if you think you can ignore my second rule, I'm going to have to ask you to reevaluate your life and think about the consequences of your decisions. But I digress...

The white Vans have become my go-to travel shoes on my trips abroad. Those suckers have survived walks across campus, the cobblestone streets of Rome and Florence, and the better paved streets and parks of London. But that's not to say that these shoes don't have their flaws. They would be the superheroes of shoes if only they were water-repellant. After a walk through ankle-deep puddles in Rome, I found myself in a situation where I had to blow-dry my shoes with the hotel hair dryer at approximately 10:30 p.m. Anyway, I learned that I couldn't prepare for everything and that all hope was not lost when the white Vans faltered.

I've made a lot of footprints in these shoes, metaphorical and physical, and they have the dirt stains to prove it. My white Vans are no longer in the pristine condition that could blind someone on a sunny day. To be fair, I could probably wash them, and they'd look a lot nicer. But let's be real here: is that going to happen anytime soon? My laziness about cleaning my shoes aside, each stain symbolizes somewhere new that I've walked. The stains are a part of that place that I can physically carry with me even after returning to the U.S. If it's socially acceptable for people not to wash jerseys or socks because they're lucky and somehow the detergent will wash away the luck, then I should have a compelling case as to why I don't need to clean off my shoes. No one is currently arguing with me that I should wash the dirt stains out of my shoes, but if anyone ever does I'll be prepared.

This memoir is my story of learning to forge my own path by following in other people's literal and metaphorical footsteps. More specifically, this is a story about how studying abroad taught me more about myself than I could have learned by staying home. Before high school, I was shy and the opposite of bubbly or outgoing. I did not think I was at all courageous. I knew that I was mature for my age, but I had no clue how to be an independent person, forging her own path. Didn't I need to ask permission before doing that? My trips abroad, in high school and

college, helped me figure out who I am as a traveler and who I am as a young adult. Each of my visits to Europe changed me in ways that I did not always recognize immediately. I didn't fully understand a lot of my growth until I started reflecting on my travels for this memoir; and that is what I'd like to share.

When I was fourteen, the thought of having that much control over my life seemed as foreign as Europe was to me. But, in the 9th grade, my theatre arts class and the drama club ignited my passion for theatre and I got out of my shell. I became a bubbly person and was less afraid of looking silly. As long as whatever silly thing I did was entertaining to people, I was good to go. I became more confident about being true to myself and sharing my true self with others.

I think my real journey to independence began when the foreign language department at my high school announced that they were planning a spring break trip to Europe in March of my junior year. They would visit England, France, and Spain in the span of eight days. Eight days touring another continent with the guidance of our teachers and the parents who volunteered to chaperone. I wanted to go. Seeing London, Paris, and Madrid was on my bucket list, should I ever make it to Europe. Neither of my parents had ever left the country. I have an aunt who studied abroad in Germany back in 2001, and my grandparents did visit her there, but they hadn't traveled abroad since, so, I didn't have a lot of European connections. This was sailing into uncharted territory for me and I would have to figure things out on my own, with the help of my teachers who had traveled abroad before and knew what they were doing.

My whole life I'd been reading books and watching movies with characters who went on these fantastic, magical, thrilling, and sometimes death-defying adventures. If you think about it, every Disney princess movie involves the princess going somewhere new, meeting new people,

and becoming a different person. As I got older and discovered I loved reading classic novels, I saw a similar pattern. When I was nineteen, Jane Austen's heroines became my new Disney princesses. In both examples I saw young women going out on their own to do what everyone said they couldn't do or maybe what they themselves didn't think they could do. Talk about using your agency to take control of your life at a young age. While I could relate to them in terms of their ages and the goals they wanted to accomplish, it felt to me that these types of adventures could only exist in fiction, even if there weren't any dragons or castles involved. I'd also like to point out that there are plenty of castles in the real world, so that's not an entirely lost cause, and we have Komodo dragons. But, I wasn't finding castles or Komodo dragons in the small Indiana town I'd spent most of my life living in. By the time I was considered a legal adult I knew that adventures existed in real life and, like the characters from the stories I loved, I might just have to venture outside of my neighborhood to find them. So, my Disney princess-Jane Austen heroine hybrid self double-knotted her white Vans and set out to see the world.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Before I could put on my Vans, I had to take baby steps on my first European adventure. I had to slip on and zip up my tall brown boots. While those were a comfortable option for walking, provided I remembered to insert shoe insoles, they were harder to get on and off. They didn't offer as much freedom, but neither did that first trip abroad. And it's a good thing it didn't. I mean, you can't just set a bunch of seventeen-year-olds loose in Europe when they've only known southeast Indiana. We always had a grown-up with us leading the way in Europe. We followed closely behind our teachers and tour guide and rarely went off in small groups without an adult chaperone. That kind of increased freedom came with time and practice. I had to work my way up to the point where I could get lost in Rome with my friends or

put myself on an international flight to England, so I could walk through London on my own in my white Vans.

Walking on my own in Europe was like learning how to physically walk as a child. Before I could take my first big-girl steps, I had to practice standing and walking with help. Okay, I guess before that I also needed to learn how to crawl and hold my own head up, but for the sake of the analogy we'll assume that I'd gotten that far, both literally in terms of being able to walk and figuratively in terms of my travel skills. I don't remember anything about learning to walk, but I'm pretty sure I wasn't imagining that one day I would be able to run or dance without someone holding me up. At seventeen, I didn't think that I would travel abroad three times, or any number of times for that matter, before I was twenty-one. But I did learn how to physically walk on my own and I did travel to Europe three times before I could legally consume and purchase alcohol in the United States. When I was seventeen, preparing for my spring break in Europe, I didn't think this trip would have such a profound impact on my personal growth as an independent young woman. I knew it would be the trip of a lifetime, but I couldn't see the long-lasting effects yet.

Panic



I just arrived at the airport,
about to get my first ever
boarding pass.

All right, so I may have lied a tiny bit. This is not the chapter that starts off with my first day in Europe. It is about my first time flying, though (that is, if you don't count that time I flew when I was a little over one year old, which I don't count because I didn't even have my own oxygen mask). I'm sure you were on the edge of your seat, assuming you are in fact sitting while reading this, wanting to read my thoughts and feelings about seeing England for the first time. But first, I need to take you on a psychological journey, so you can see where I was at mentally and emotionally before leaving the country. Everything will make more

sense once you see where my mind was before my body went to Europe. My mind went with me also; I didn't literally lose my mind in Europe, though at times it may look like I figuratively lost it. So, to set the scene: junior year of high school, the week before spring break begins, I just finished performing in the school's spring musical, *The Music Man*, and the reality of this trip was starting to sink in.

The week before spring break during my junior year of high school was one of the most stressful things I'd encountered up to date. I think that was partly because I was convinced the world was trying to see how many stress-induced breakdowns I could endure before cracking. We left for Europe in the middle of the week, which meant I needed to make up two days' worth of work. It was also the end of the grading period. And I had yet to pack for my trip. I was leaving in less than 24 hours and hadn't packed a thing. I hadn't even made a list. For someone

like me who strives to always be ahead of the game and plan everything, this situation made me panic and stress sweat. Apparently, I thought the world was ending. I was a dramatic theatre kid, I must say. And for someone who was, and still is, an easy crier, I was just trying to keep it together at that point. Oh yeah, maybe I should mention to you that my seventeen, nineteen, and twenty-year-old selves cry a lot in this memoir.

Whenever I had a crisis in high school, I went to my favorite teacher Mrs. Hines. Remember how I said my theatre arts class helped get me out of my shell and influenced the person I am today? She taught it. Naturally, I thought I would go express this mild (and by that, I mean major) concern to her. Any crisis I had she could smooth over within about two minutes. I always left her classroom with a smile and feeling better than when I entered. She responded to the current crisis with, "Julia Robben! You have not packed?!" Well, if I got nothing else from that reaction, I at least knew that my panic was justifiable. Before I could even open the can of worms to try to explain my current predicament of taking my English test early, pushing back a chemistry exam, and worrying about what would happen if I got my period in Europe (I remember thinking to myself, "How does that even work over there?! I don't want to feel like I'm next to death while looking at the Eiffel Tower or something"), which is why I didn't have time to even contemplate packing, Mrs. Anderson walked by.

Mrs. Anderson was my former English teacher, who was also in charge of the Europe trip. Mrs. Hines said to her, "This child has not packed anything, and she is leaving for Europe tomorrow!" Great. Now Mrs. Anderson knew that I procrastinated the essential preparation for a huge undertaking. If only they'd been able to hear my long-winded excuse as to why. I didn't want to look like I was slacking or losing control. I could lecture myself plenty about not doing enough, or being enough, especially in terms of school, and was trying to avoid a lecture from an

adult about how I needed to be more organized or how bad it was to be a procrastinator.

Fortunately, my mind was put at ease when Mrs. Anderson simply replied with, “Well, I know what you’re going to be doing tonight.”

After what was probably about five hours of attempting to pack, I finally figured out what to wear for a week in weather exactly like the “spring” weather in southeastern Indiana. For whatever reason, the weather seemed like it must be different because it’s across the ocean and the numbers are in Celsius. If you thought high school dress codes were difficult to abide by, try planning for the possibility that you may be going to a cathedral where you need to be completely covered, which should not be a problem in the winter, but still, it was something else I had to think about. I decided that I would just plan for literally any occurrence, to be on the safe side.

I was also asking myself how was I supposed to blend in and not look outwardly American? What did Europeans even look like? What were they wearing? The fashion from the fashion shows was probably flashier than any sweater I’d show up in. Plus, I was pretty sure they’d catch on to the fact that we were American after seeing a group of thirty people with American accents walking slowly through the streets, taking pictures of everything. But what did I know? I figured I’d just leave the American flag tank top at home and wear something “European,” whatever that was (it was a black turtleneck).



Here is my seventeen-year-old self’s “European” aesthetic.

Five hours of packing and planning with my mom led to one incredibly full, giant pink suitcase that I was expected to drag through the cobblestone streets of Europe. There was also a smaller, matching carry-on that I needed to pack, so I would be dragging two bags around each time we moved to another city. Why did winter wear have to be so bulky? Didn't winter realize I was trying to bring back all the souvenirs and not break any part of myself while trying to transport them? Thank goodness for travel Febreze allowing me to recycle my skinny jeans so I could also bring just one pair of shoes to reduce the bulk. Those would be the infamous brown boots from the last chapter. They went with every outfit and they were comfortable to walk in. And they were darn cute. Yet it still seemed that I managed to over pack. I definitely was overthinking the weather and the trip in general.

I had been mentally preparing for the morning of March 20, 2014, for the better part of a year, but I felt like I was behind. Like I wasn't ready to go, or I couldn't do it. Something could go awry, and I'd fail. Not at school, just at this small section of life. I tried to remain calm on the drive and just be full of excitement, instead of worry. But I kept feeling the urge to cry. I told myself, "I am not a baby; don't be a baby." I am a crybaby, though, which is completely different. Since I cried so easily, it would've been no shock to anyone to find me in tears on any given occasion. But I thought if I cried, it would look like I didn't want to go--and I did want to go. For whatever reason, I was just scared. Was I afraid of flying? I didn't think so. Was I afraid of leaving my mom and dad? That felt silly because I was seventeen years old and definitely past the point of needing them to tuck me in at night. Was I just a tad overwhelmed because it was a long-ass week of academic stress, accompanied by some premenstrual stress, and it was a big change to get on an international flight and leave the country for the first time, especially considering I didn't handle change well? Perhaps...

But I managed to swallow that huge lump in my throat that pops up before a sob fest and weave my way through the various lines and counters. At this point I felt lost and was following blindly behind my teachers, the other chaperones, and anyone else who looked like they had been inside an airport before. How did these people know where they are going? What if you got to the wrong gate and accidentally ended up on a plane to China? That would've been a big problem because I didn't speak Mandarin and I didn't tell my bank or phone company that I would be in China. Then I would've been disconnected from all my resources. THEN WHAT DO I DO??? I still don't have an answer to that question. But thankfully for me, our adults had all been on a plane before and knew how to navigate an airport. I decided to stay as close to them as possible without being weird. I'd seen *Taken*, okay, and there was no way anyone I knew at home would be able to perform a Liam Neeson and save me from the bad guys.

I haven't often found myself in a situation where I was just sitting somewhere, minding my own business, with about eight pairs of eyes fixed on me to see what sort of reaction I would have next. But on my first flight ever (minus that one when I didn't have my own oxygen mask), a 45-minute connecting flight from Cincinnati to Chicago, the other kids sitting near me watched to see what I would do once the plane took off. Were they expecting me to panic? Cry? Throw up? I have no idea, but my first take off was fine. It was just like ramping onto the interstate, just at 600 miles per hour, or something like that, and we didn't have to worry about merging into the lane because there seems to be far less airplane traffic in the early afternoon than car traffic during rush hour on I-275.

Our second flight, the one that took us to London, was not as fun. I kept waking up throughout the night. I ended up rewinding *Frozen* five times to pick up where I left off before falling asleep the last time. When the airplane decided it was morning and turned the lights on, I

was getting anxious about what was to come. The flight attendants started handing out these blue cards to fill out and my first question, after “what is this?” was “is this a survey?” No, I did not care to rate my flight experience today but thank you. Turns out it was not a survey; it was a bunch of questions about what I was doing in this country. Now I was concerned about this added responsibility of filling out a government-like card that no one cared to mention before we left. What if I messed it up and had to be called in by the TSA or the British government or those red British guards with the fluffy hats for an interrogation like you see on episodes of *Law and Order*? I’d probably end up saying something like, “I’m not trying to immigrate, I’m just going on vacation!”

I must have done it right because I slipped by without being dragged into an interrogation room where I had to answer to the British equivalent of J. Edgar Hoover. I kept thinking I was an inexperienced traveler, but at least I didn’t leave my passport on the plane. Yes, someone did that. And they set the alarm off going back to get it. And the airport didn’t lose my luggage, which happened to someone else in our group. Despite my tendency to get carsick on the hilly, twisty Indiana roads, I did not throw up on the flight. I’d say that having been on British soil for only an hour or two, I was doing pretty well.

To Bea or Not to Bea

When we finally made our way out of the customs line (which moved so slowly I could've written the next great American novel while waiting) we needed to find our tour guide from the travel company. Finding people in airports looked so much easier on TV. That might be because all I'd been watching were '90s sitcoms and you could still meet people at the gate. *Friends* gave me completely outdated information. I had no idea what 21st century airports were like. I just knew that my heart sank when Ross said he was at JFK instead of Newark and it rose when Rachel announced that she got off the plane. Regardless, it would be such a big help if people would just make huge fluorescent signs directing you to them. Or when you're getting picked up by a stranger, maybe you could get a picture of the person you're supposed to be looking for. I sure hoped we weren't looking for a man in a business suit because those men were everywhere. Hence the need for a fluorescent sign to stand out from the crowd. How was I supposed to differentiate between all of them? Our tour guide, Bea, was not a businessman; she was a tour guide and she was British. She was the first actual British person I met, and I knew then that this trip was legit.

Bea stayed with us for all eight days and got us where we needed to go. Thank goodness, because I had no idea where I was going. The airport was difficult enough, then we went outside where people drive on the left side of the road and traffic felt backwards. That could've been a death-trap. I figured as long as I followed closely behind her I would hopefully make it back in one piece. Instead of thinking about *Finding Nemo* when Dory says to "Just keep swimming," I thought, "Just follow the magenta coat and the white backpack," which, I'll admit, doesn't have the same ring to it. And if I couldn't do that, my next step was to find Mrs. Anderson because she was the Liam Neeson of the group, and she said she will find us. No matter how many *Taken*

scenarios I worried about, I did feel safe walking through Europe with our adults. I knew that they were not going to leave any of us behind and that they wouldn't let anything bad happen to us. And we were being shown Europe by a real European, so I felt we were in good hands.

I was fascinated by how much knowledge Bea had of the places we visited. I don't know if she had cheat sheets or if she researched the places on our itinerary before we left, but she seemed to just know the history off the top of her head. Maybe we just knew next to nothing about European history and this stuff was common knowledge in the U.K. Bea just happened to know when all the buildings were built, and who built them, and then who invaded trying to conquer the land. She had already seen so much of the world and she spoke at least three languages. I was two and a half years into learning French and didn't think I was going to hold my own very well in Paris. I guess it would be easier to become fluent in multiple languages if you were living in Europe where the countries are smaller, and you could easily hop the border to France for the weekend or go to Germany on holiday. So, I felt incredibly unaccomplished in terms of my worldliness, but I was only seventeen; and I knew that the way I would get better was by following where Bea led. I thought she had the coolest job, getting to travel the world and show people everything it has to offer. Bea was the Aladdin showing our group of twenty-something Jasmynes a whole new world.

Bea led our group of over thirty people, including the adults, through the crowded city streets, weaving in between other pedestrians and dodging traffic. Is it a European thing to be a good walker? If so, then I was pretty sure I could pass for a native European. All those years of speed walking through the halls to get to class were finally paying off. I've already mentioned my fear of being taken, but I should also point out that I had another fear of being lost, even without being held captive. Again, I did feel completely safe with our grown-ups, but I was a bit

navigationally challenged in the U.S. when going somewhere unfamiliar, and this whole continent was unfamiliar to me. I was grateful to have someone with better navigational experience leading me. I convinced myself I'd be doomed if I got separated from the group. Our adults realized that about all of us, so each time we got to a new destination, or were leaving one, we counted off to make sure we didn't lose anyone. I was number twenty. Having successfully completed preschool, however, I was pretty good at this whole concept of staying with the group.

In addition to following Bea because I literally had no idea where we were going, and I had no map, I could tell from the first day that she was a cool grown-up. And cool grown-ups who were not afraid to have fun and be themselves were my kind of people. Cool grown-ups who talked to us like we were regular people, not these young, inexperienced kids. For whatever reason, other people my age didn't like talking to grown-ups; meanwhile, I was over in the corner thinking those other kids were crazy. Talking to grown-ups was great for me. I'd thought for a while that I was mentally out of high school and I was getting tired of people going on and on about unimportant stuff that wouldn't even matter in a year and a half. Perhaps that was why I spent my free time hanging out with my teachers. My inner monologue was something like, "I really admire you; what do I have to do to get on your level? Please think I'm good and give me some affirmation!" That never went away; even in college as I was studying to become a teacher I would strive to be like my favorite professors, silently hoping to one day reach their level in terms of their teaching expertise and in terms of how awesome I thought they were as people. Bea was one of the first of many cool adults I encountered during my formative years who inspired me to become the young adult I wanted to be.

Looking back on this first trip to Europe, I think Bea represented an ideal that I didn't think possible for myself. I wanted to be like her before I met her. I wanted to grow up to be an

independent woman who knew how to navigate the world, in every sense of the phrase. I also hadn't encountered someone quite like Bea before. Everyone I knew was pretty grounded in southeast Indiana. They had spent the majority of their lives living there, or they may have lived in a bordering state for a while. But I wanted to venture out, much like the yearning female protagonists of every young adult novel set in a small town that can't contain her big dreams. How original, I know. This is not to say that the town I grew up in was a bad place to live; many people enjoyed living there, and I have great memories growing up there, but I just wanted something different. Bea had been to numerous places and understood what the world had to offer. She'd experienced it firsthand, and now she was going to share that with us. Meeting Bea, and having that short relationship with her, showed me how I had the world at my fingertips and I could go out and do anything I wanted.

I arrived in Europe ready to learn as much about these places that I could within a few days. These countries, cities, and monuments had existed solely, for me, on the pages of textbooks and classic novels. They were almost inaccessible until I actually got to stand there myself. While I knew that there were other continents and countries in the world, obviously, being so distanced from them made the rest of the world feel as fictional as the setting of a fantasy novel. Being in Europe felt unreal, and yet more real than anything I'd ever experienced. Within eight days I got to see and experience firsthand some of the most iconic places in the world. Each day was filled with new adventures and opportunities to learn hundreds of new things. Looking around at Europe I couldn't believe this was me there and not a vision in my head of a book I was reading. It's easy to romanticize the memories you have of an experience, especially when you're young and seeing the world for the first time. But even now, having

grown out of my teen years, I don't think I made the experience into something bigger than what it was. I don't think that would be possible. Even for a histrionic, seventeen-year-old storyteller.

Before we parted ways, Bea told us that one day these would all be hazy memories. She implied that there would come a time when this group of people wouldn't be together in Europe or in the U.S. We had grown accustomed to traveling together through Europe, but we wouldn't be doing that forever. As someone who was somewhat frightened by the future, this sounded horrible. I didn't one hundred percent believe her that this trip would be a hazy memory one day because when you've only lived seventeen years and one month, it's hard to see a long-term future. If I couldn't even see graduation day on the horizon, I sure wasn't going to see my next grown-up travel experience. While I knew she was right, thinking about the next few years of my life seemed so far away that it would be impossible for me to be disconnected from spring break 2014 and for it to exist as a distant memory. Well, seventeen-year-old me, it happened. I did believe her, though, when she said, "But you've all got the travel bug now, so you'll be trying to come back." Before we got off the bus to walk into the airport to go home, I wholeheartedly knew that I would do anything I could to come back.

I hoped that when I got to college I could do something amazing like this again. As scary as it was to think about leaving high school and everything that was familiar, (again, I did not handle change well), I thought that I might make the transition if it meant getting another chance to see Europe. On our last day with Bea, I wrote her a goodbye letter saying that she inspired me to learn as much as I could about other places and to get out and see them. I remember handing her this letter, written on the finest sheet of notebook paper (I even pulled off those annoying fringed edges), with tears in my eyes. I have no idea if she cried while reading it or what she even thought about us. But that almost didn't matter. I just needed her to know how much I



Here we are, a few moments before our group left
Bea to go through security.

appreciated what she did for us and how much I enjoyed getting to know her. In the course of one week I made a new friend whom I was devastated to leave, probably to never see again. Even if we never meet again, I know that I will never forget her and all the lessons she taught me about being an independent, worldly adult. I'll happily write her name on my list of inspirational, independent women whose footsteps I followed.

Eye Love London

When I look back on why I was excited to visit London, I remember one of the main reasons was that I could see the city where many of my favorite stories took place. It hit me as I walked outside the airport and into the streets of London: not only was I walking miles each day with our group, following behind Bea and trying to see as much of the city as possible, but in my



My first selfie in a foreign country was taken with messy hair, minutes after leaving the airport.

head, I was also metaphorically walking those miles in different characters' shoes. I think it's best that I warn you now about how nerdy I was (and still am) when it came to classic literature and musical theatre. I can go from zero to show tunes in an instant, so be prepared.

Thinking about the books I'd enjoyed reading in school, I realized that this was the closest I'd come to feeling like a character in a book without having to perfect time travel to have Charlotte Brontë put me in *Jane Eyre*. But the really geeky aspect of my newfound obsession with being in England manifests in the music I listened to. I'd been pretty dedicated to the show tune genre since finding the *Wicked* soundtrack at age fourteen. In London, I decided to only listen to musicals that were either set in London or premiered in London. I guess I was looking for the most authentic theatrical experience that I could get outside of a theater. For example, I'd fall asleep listening to the *Jekyll and Hyde* soundtrack and then hear it in my head as we walked through London and imagine the streets as sites of Hyde's rampages. Maybe it was because I

didn't know of many stories that took place in Indiana, but the concept of being able to walk through a story world that also existed in real life felt almost magical.

If that wasn't enough to get my theatre nerd self excited, I cried when we saw theater marquees lining the streets. On the bus tour during our first morning in London we passed Her Majesty's Theatre where *The Phantom of the Opera* opened over twenty-five years ago and permanently changed the lives of theatre kids everywhere. That was where it started. The place is real. The cast and production team came to work every day to tell that beautiful story that became the quintessential big book musical, and I was right in front of it. At the time of this trip I was coming down from a four-month obsession with this musical, and its sequel *Love Never Dies*, and seeing it live was at the top of my bucket list. Even with all that lovely teenage insecurity, I was not embarrassed or ashamed that I cried just as we drove by. We didn't even go inside, and I'd been brought to tears.

With my friend Jake Wolfe as my witness, I determined that if I got back to London one day I would see *Phantom* and I'd find The Queen's Theatre to see *Les Misérables* where it began. Simply looking at the theaters where these groundbreaking musicals began felt like an honor because I was so in awe of Andrew Lloyd Webber's music for *Phantom* and Claude-Michel Schönberg's and Alain Boublil's writing for *Les Mis*. I wondered what it must have been like to be in London in the '80s when these shows opened without knowing that they would become international sensations. I still don't know what that was like, but standing near the theater in general must have spread some creativity to me. These two musicals, along with *Wicked*, which is still my favorite, played an influential role in my high school self's desire to pursue musical theatre and become a professional storyteller.

Not only were London's fictional stories captivating but seeing the sites and learning about British history also piqued my interest. But a lot of the history we were taught in school felt like fiction to me. Of course, I knew that this stuff actually happened, and these people were real. I wasn't wandering around my high school telling people that Queen Elizabeth I was fake or anything. Yet I'd always felt disconnected to it all because I couldn't see these people in the flesh. Okay, I understood that I couldn't see historical figures in the flesh because they're dead. I had been to a wax museum though, does that count? Probably not. I'd seen the *Declaration of Independence* before, so I knew that our breaking away from England was real, but the concept of the British monarchy during that time felt almost fictitious to me. I struggled to connect with real events, yet I could connect to musicals about supposedly wicked witches, revolutions in nineteenth century France, and trying to pay rent in 1990s New York City. I couldn't figure that out when I was in high school. As an undergraduate, I figured out that it was because those stories were all commenting on an aspect of the human condition, which was easy to relate to considering that I am a human.

When I was in high school I could say that when we went to the Tower of London I felt a heck of a lot closer to British history than I had ever been before. My travel journal reads, "We went to the Tower of London for three hours and I saw the crown jewels, torture devices, old castle architecture, old weapons, and a guard." Really, just one guard in that whole place? I don't know how that one guard was supposed to protect the entire tower, but whatever. Even back in the day they would've needed at least two. British history became real to me as my false preconceived notions about the Tower were cleared up. It's not a skyscraper. It's a bunch of super old castles. Some of them have the crown jewels, while some of them have torture

equipment. It's like a fun guessing game which one you'll stumble into. Well, in the 21st century it's fun.

Once Bea got us to the Tower, we were allowed to go exploring in small groups. I didn't expect to ever be without a grown-up, but this was also an enclosed space, so it wasn't like they sent us out into the street with a map and maybe we'd find our way back to the hotel. My favorite part of the Tower of London was seeing the crown jewels. They certainly lived up to the hype. And even if they didn't, who was I to say the crown jewels were just sub-par? It was a great museum experience; we stood on one of those moving sidewalks, like at the airport, and it moved us around the jewels. It was great because then we didn't have those people that just stand there for about five years looking at the same thing, meticulously reading the little labels in every language.

What a nice change of pace (pun mildly intended) from walking across the ancient cobblestones. I guess the paths were not something that got renovated. I thought, "How cool is it to just stroll down the street and walk past where people walked centuries ago? Before your country was even a thought? Places like this are all over the country. Does this ever become normal to just be strolling down the street and walking by the location where something incredible happened?" Bea said that she grew up in the U.K., and I kept wondering what that must be like. I'm sure it was similar to our experiences growing up in the U.S. but the fact that it was in Europe made it seem borderline extraordinary. Were they thinking that about kids growing up in the U.S.? The countries aren't that different; we have museums and monuments just like they do.

After we regrouped at the Tower, Bea led us to the British Museum. Our group stuck together well, and Bea didn't even have one of those tall yellow flags to hold so the group knew

where they were going. I was convinced I learned more that day than I did in a year of AP World History. Listening to Bea explain snippets of history as we walked by the artifacts stuck with me longer than any textbook did. There I got to actually engage with the history as I saw it with my own eyes, rather than looking at a PowerPoint slide with endless bullet points of facts. I knew I'd remember seeing the Rosetta Stone and crowding around the glass case next to a bunch of other tourists. Its name is pretty accurate; it's literally a stone that translates a bunch of languages. You know what name is not accurate? Big Ben's. Apparently, it's only the bell that is known as Big Ben, and my whole life felt like a lie. Thank you, Bea, for that enlightenment.

Anyway, I was standing near the tourists with the big cameras getting glares off the glass in their pictures of the Rosetta Stone. I did realize that I too was a tourist in this situation, but there was a big difference. My camera was smaller and, therefore, less of a hassle to travel with. I took pictures of anything and everything I saw because everything was new and exciting. I thought that must be what it's like to first experience the world as a baby. Except, we only had two days to soak up and experience this world before leaving for Paris. For all I knew, March 21 and 22 of 2014 were the only times I would be in London. I put in my travel journal that, "I've tried to take as many pictures and write as much as I can to help me remember this trip." I wanted to be able to look at these pictures years later, so I could relive my junior spring break.

I have since looked back at those pictures and there are hardly any of me. Every picture is of a building, or something from a museum, or it's food. About half of the pictures of me I've deemed unsatisfactory because they were bad selfies I took where my facial expression looks weird. Or the lighting was so unflattering that it made my seventeen-year-old self's acne stand out far too much for my liking. Most of these pictures were taken from the bus window or at high angles as we walked by buildings. In my younger self's defense, this was a fast-paced trip, so I



One of the few instances that I slowed down to get my picture taken, with Big Ben in the background.

didn't have the time to pretend I was a professional photographer working with the lighting and camera angles. The pictures I have exemplify the phrase that the best way to experience a city is by walking it. By the looks of my pictures, all we did was walk through the city, never stopping to actually

look at anything long enough to get a picture of us with it.

One of the few times we stood still for a semi-extended period of time was when Bea walked us to Buckingham Palace and announced that it was time for the changing of the guard. The royal guards (there was more than one this time, thank goodness) marched in sync down the road after a long shift of protecting the queen. As far as I knew, we didn't have any sort of ceremony in front of the White House when the Secret Service changed shifts. It started to sprinkle as we watched them walk by, but at least we had the luxury of hoods or umbrellas in this London weather. This was the closest I got to the British monarchy. I'd jokingly mentioned to my family that wouldn't it be cool if I saw Queen Elizabeth II, or Lizzie, as I liked to call her. I was one step closer, seeing the guards who have probably seen her. And Prince Harry was single, so all I needed to do was turn eighteen, return to England, marry Harry and become a real-life princess. It seemed like a fairly simple plan. I watched William and Kate get married when I was in the eighth grade and from that point on I developed a liking for the British royal family. Living in America, royalty existed for me solely in books and also seemed fictional. But I saw

real guards, in front of a real palace, so I knew this queen was real and so was the establishment of a monarchy in the 21st century.

As great as walking through London was, it didn't compare to looking at the city from the top of the biggest Ferris wheel ever (probably). Being in the London Eye beats out any cobblestone path in my book. It was cool to walk the same paths as a lot of famous British people, behind our tour guide and chaperones, but we got to see the city from a perspective that I'm assuming many of Britain's historical figures did not. It took half an hour to go all the way around and we felt like we were on top of the world. The London Eye is easily my favorite Ferris wheel; however, there was not steep competition there because the Bright Festival back home didn't even have a Ferris wheel. If I thought my town was lacking in entertainment before, seeing London didn't help the matter.

Being in the London Eye let me see Shakespeare's Globe from a higher height than he ever could, at least while he was alive. Speaking of William Shakespeare, they did not take us into the Globe, which felt like a crime against my very existence. All I'd been asking for these past two and a half years of my high school career was to study theatre all the time (and that was not a secret because I told literally anyone who would listen). There we were in the theatrical epicenter, the birthplace of the rebirth of theatre, and we just bypassed what I'll call the theater of all theaters. For all I knew, Shakespeare walked on this street, but I was like, we'll never know now. I was that student who enjoyed reading Shakespeare for class and I wanted to see his influence in London, you know, the place where his plays were first performed and gained popularity. I guessed that visiting the Globe would have to go on that itinerary for the hypothetical trip to England where I'd also see *Phantom* and *Les Mis*.

My actual trip to England was only two days, and they sped by faster than I'd expected. Yet in that time I knew that I'd done more things overseas than some people get to do in a lifetime. I wrote in my travel journal, "I've done so many things for the first time and I'm really proud of myself. It blows my mind that while I'm here experiencing life, everyone back home had to still go to school. I'm exhausted and yet so happy at the same time." I did it; I took the first step. I was already becoming more of a grown-up and I could tell even while we were still abroad. There was no one there to make sure I ate and slept; that was all my responsibility. It's not like I wasn't in charge of taking care of myself at all in the U.S. but at home I knew that I could always fall back on my parents if I ran into a problem. Overseas, I didn't have them to fall back on, so I had to become more self-sufficient.

At home I was well aware of that fact that I was directionally challenged. Anything involving navigating a new place stressed me out (and still does). Somehow in London I caught on quickly to the orientation of the tube stops. I remembered enough to write in my travel journal, "If I get off the tube at South Kensington I can get to Royal Albert Hall, at Gloucester Road the hotel." This may perhaps be the only time I'd been somewhat navigationally savvy. I got lost at home trying to drive a half hour distance to the mall I'd been to numerous times before. But the London Underground was easy. I thought that I could probably handle doing that on my own if I lived in London and got used



I proudly took this selfie on the Tube.

to this being my normal method of transportation. I was also glad that I would not actually have to be in charge of getting myself or the group from point A to point B. Bea and our chaperones were my security blanket, much like my parents at home were. I did gain some confidence, though I wasn't sure how confident I was in my confidence. At least I'd taken some baby steps growing as an independent traveler over those two days in London, and I still had Paris and Madrid to experience.

During my last evening in London, I wrote in my travel journal, "I already feel older. I don't really feel far from home. I don't really get homesick; I think about my family at night mostly. I just want to tell them about my days. I already feel so glad and blessed that I got to go on this trip. I love London." I felt attached to London, and even though we were leaving for Paris, I was sad to leave. Two days was not enough time to get the full experience (I still hadn't met the queen!), but it was more than I expected I would get at seventeen. I didn't handle change well, but the trip was so fast-paced I didn't have time to dwell on any feelings of sadness about leaving England; I was preoccupied with preparing to go to France. And even after seeing Paris and Madrid, I still claimed London was my favorite city.

Coup de Moulin is French for “Neapolitan Ice Cream Bar”



I apparently had to take another selfie on public transportation.

The morning of March 23 presented another first for our group. We left a foreign country for another foreign country. I’d adjusted to that whole taking care of myself thing. I packed everything the night before and was ready to go on time. That might have been because I’d become such a mature traveler, or because the previous night all the grown-ups kept nagging us to pack immediately once we got

back to the hotel. Apparently, any time we went anywhere it had to be at the crack of dawn and someone or something had to get lost. But I was prepared, like an adult, to head to the train station so we could leave the country in the smoothest manner possible.

This was also my first train ride and it just happened to be under the English Channel. I couldn’t imagine how intense this trip must have been for Mrs. Anderson to plan and make sure we all got over there, like, how did she know how to book these things? Gosh, and to have to be in charge of all of us...Before we left she said, “Now, kids, what is the most important thing to remember when leaving the country?” My seat buddy, Jake, promptly got up out of his seat, while waving his hand like, “Ooooh pick me, teacher! Pick me!” and shouted with the most confidence I’ve ever heard in an answer ever, “*Your luggage!*” This apparently was not the right answer, and Mrs. Anderson quickly responded, “No. Your passport. Everyone check that they have their passports.”

We did. They were in those irritating passport holder things that we wore under our shirts. If you thought pulling a twenty out of your bra to pay at McDonald's was mildly embarrassing, you clearly haven't had to pull an entire satchel out from under your sweater just to access your wallet in the line at a French McDonald's. Then there was the slightly awkward process of putting it back under the sweater, which I'm sure looked so attractive to literally everyone else around us. Not inconvenient at all. Thanks, parents, for these handy travel tips coming from people who had never been out of the country. I realize now that their intentions were good; they just wanted to protect us from the pickpockets. Each parent and teacher wanted to keep us as safe as possible. It's good to be aware of our surroundings, but the passport holder was more of a hassle than it was worth, in my professional opinion. Bea lived in Europe and she seemed to be doing just fine without one. And we didn't think that we'd ever be without our group and all the chaperones, so there would always be people looking out for us.

Anyway, we arrived in Paris and the adults let us wander off by ourselves. By that I mean we got instructions to eat lunch and then meet back up at the Paris Opera House. Now, at every single one of those pre-travel meetings that I went to with my parents, every other parent and teacher was like, "Don't go to McDonald's while you're over there. Get something actually French, and also McDonald's doesn't taste good over there." Again, this advice came from people who had never left the country. I was going to have to start taking people's travel tips with a grain of salt and figure things out for myself. I thought my McDonald's experience was important enough to put in my travel journal and wrote, "This food is so much better than what we have back home." The chaperones let us off the leash and we fetched the best Chicken McNuggets in the western hemisphere, probably because France's health standards are different from ours. Students- 1, Grown-ups- 0. I also had never felt classier eating McDonald's than on

the steps of the Paris Opera House under the arch to avoid the sudden downpour. I thought England was supposed to be notorious for that?

Regardless, this was one of the few times the adults let us off the leash to go somewhere by ourselves, with at least two buddies, and meet back up at our designated meeting place. We did it without getting lost and managed to avoid any other sort of crisis. I tended to do this thing where I doubted my own abilities, not just about interpreting the language but also about being a self-sufficient adult because it's a scary concept if you haven't had to do it before. At home I didn't have to be a full-fledged adult; I was just a teenager with some adult-like qualities. No one was betting against us that we couldn't handle going out without an adult, but it still felt like we'd beaten the odds, especially since none of us spoke fluent French. Every student walked back early, and we had to wait on the adults to find us. Students- 2, Grown-ups- 0.

Just when I thought that eating on the steps of the Paris Opera House couldn't get more exciting, our additional tour guide for the day, Julian, told us that this was the place that inspired Gaston Leroux's novel *Le Fantome de l'Opera* (*The Phantom of the Opera*). The story is based on true events and there may still even be a ghost in Box #5. It was real! So, I cried. Also, the parts of *Les Mis* with the barricade and the revolution were real, too. More tears. I just ate McDonald's on the steps of the opera house where the "real" Christine Daaé may have walked. I



A casual lunchtime selfie at the Paris Opera House.

could've walked down a street that was barricaded during the revolution. I knew the novels and

the musicals themselves were fictional but standing there in Paris made it feel more and more realistic, or at least like I'd crossed over into another realm, the world where these stories take place. My travel journal reads, "It kind of blows my mind that people are born in these countries and live here or moved here and this is their life. I feel I really needed to get out and see the world, I'm unbelievably happy I'm doing this."

I loved school, and I loved learning. But traveling through Europe was teaching me things that I couldn't learn in a traditional classroom setting. It wouldn't have been enough for me to just read about these countries. I needed someone to show me how to experience a new place. Following Bea, who had vastly different global experiences than we did, added a layer of authenticity to our trip. I gained a richer understanding of the world by following her, especially since she was with us all eight days. Julian was with us for less than a day in Paris to give us a rundown of the sites with some fun anecdotes in between. He catered more to the tourist aspect of our visit. But Bea was able to share more of her experiences with us, showing what it meant to live in Europe, not just to see it. My seventeen-year-old self was starting to realize that to truly experience the world, I couldn't just observe it at the surface level; I had to try new things, ask questions, and savor each moment, no matter how daunting any of that might be.

One of the greatest differences I noticed between my hometown and Europe in general was the access to cultural activities. At home, if I wanted to go somewhere with any sort of art I had to drive at least half an hour. In Paris, we took a short walk to the Louvre, so we could see many famous paintings that I had never heard of. Or, on the other side of the Seine was the modern art museum, the Musée d'Orsay, which probably also had many famous paintings that I'd never heard of. But we only went to the Louvre, so that's just an assumption. We had three hours to go through this museum in groups of three or four. We were flirting more and more with

this concept of going places on our own, and this was also a new experience of rebellion. Instead of going in a group of three or four, Jake and I went as a pair. How badass, am I, right?

Thus began our self-guided tour through centuries of art, with about two years of French at our disposal for translating the informational cards. Now, I wasn't that into art. I thought art was nice and I appreciated its importance and value, but I didn't love it the way I loved theatre. Let's put it this way: I had never been moved to tears by a painting before. It was incredible to see the *Mona Lisa*, among other things, even if it was far smaller than I thought it would be. Someone who had studied art history would have thoroughly enjoyed this place. I had no prior art history lessons, so I was ill-equipped to fully appreciate the experience. I didn't know why these pieces were considered good art, other than the fact they were paintings and sculptures, both of which count as art. Plus, I could not draw, paint, or sculpt to save my life, so who was I to judge the art? The Louvre was my first visit to an art museum, and that is an incredibly privileged experience. I just wish I had been able to go with the knowledge and experiences I gained in college, so I would understand and appreciate the it more.



What can I say? I really connected with the art.

But for the time being, I was a seventeen-year-old clueless art consumer who was afraid of being terribly bored. To make the visit more enjoyable I took it upon myself to reenact the statue poses while Jake took my picture. These are some of the few pictures of me from this trip. We totally didn't look like young American tourists goofing off in a prestigious exhibition. We were the young students going through the building



Here I am, making my teachers so proud to see how much I appreciated fine art.

alone, who realized they did a fine job of navigating the museum. Well, we did a fine job of finding our group's meeting place. If the goal of the visit was for us to find our way through a public place in France without an adult, we succeeded. I don't think we did well at all in terms of learning about the art, so it might

have been better for us to have had a

guide in that situation. I didn't have that realization until college, but at least we had fun and we'd surely remember our time at the art museum.

We'd been doing well so far as independent travelers, but the next night brought our greatest test. We were let off the leash again to find ourselves dinner. We found a restaurant that was nearly empty and five of us went there. This was the most stressful dinner of my life, or at least my teenage life. *Beauty and the Beast* says that fine dining is supposed to help with stress, but what do you do when the dining is the cause of stress? I imagine that those who are legally allowed to would drink, but we were not, and thus the tale of our authentic French dining experience unfolds.

We knew it was going to be a rough dinner when it started off with the assumption that our waiter automatically hated us. As far as I knew, none of us had done anything offensive or inappropriate. We were one of maybe two or three occupied tables in the restaurant, so it wasn't like we were there during the dinner rush. Maybe it was because we were there during an off

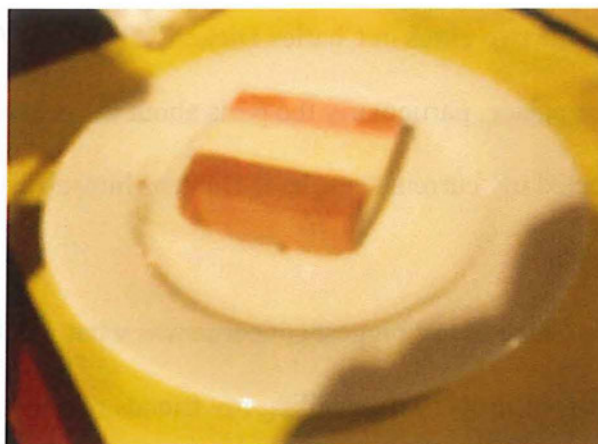
time, he then proceeded to not write down any of the orders. And there were multiple courses to this meal. Maybe that was just a French custom we weren't used to, but it seemed odd. It would've been nice to know that the waiter spoke English before most of the group attempted to order through broken French, completely butchering the language, I'm sure. Throughout the meal, he would stand near our table, not doing anything, just standing there, probably eavesdropping on our conversations. He asked us where we were from, and sighed when one of us answered, "America." Could he not tell from our accents?

The faulty communication aside, the food was good. We were brave and tried snails, which looked like these tiny black pieces of tar with little flecks of green in them. They tasted kind of like garlic chicken, but with the texture and consistency of a gummy bear. If only getting over the fear of trying snails was the most difficult part of the evening. Our waiter gave up on us and someone new came over and handed us menus before dessert. We told him that we had already ordered, and the new waiter said that they forgot what we ordered, so we'd have to reorder. Gee, if only we'd written it down to begin with we wouldn't have this problem, now would we? I'm not sure what happened during the first waiter's shift to cause him so much stress that he couldn't continue with us. If my memory serves right, everyone was being polite, and I don't think we were obnoxiously loud or anything. Granted, whatever our normal volume was could probably have been perceived as loud by European standards. Maybe he was just disgusted with the fact that we were young, American tourists, but I didn't care to ask.

We thought we were sophisticated when our dessert came because we thought we could judge good crème brûlée after having it only once before. But I guess two of us were feeling extra adventurous and didn't want to just play it safe with the crème brûlée option. Jake and Chelsea opted for something called *coup de moulin*. My years of taking French had gotten me far

on this trip, but the only possible translation I had for this dessert was *Moulin Rouge*, but I hadn't seen the movie, so I was pretty sure that was not what the dessert was.

Apparently, *coup de moulin* is French for "Neapolitan ice cream bar."



Now that I think about it, is it possible that *coup de moulin* is actually

I took a picture simply because I didn't think anyone would believe me.

something else and they just brought us ice cream because they seemed to hate us and figured we wouldn't be smart enough to know better, the rest of our group didn't have any trouble at their restaurants. Their waiters were all super friendly and helped them out with the language and asked what they were doing on their vacation. But did they get to eat a *coup de moulin*? I didn't think so.

I'd conquered new, unexpected challenges thus far in Europe and faced many of my fears about international travel; however, there was one fear that I'd yet to face. And that would happen at the Palace of Versailles. Allow me to set the scene for you: it was our last morning in Paris, the morning of March 25. Before we were literally jetting off to Madrid, we were going to visit the Palace of Versailles where King Louis XVI hung out during the French Revolution, the only piece of French history I knew. That morning it was cold, rainy, and windy, so we couldn't explore the gardens since they were muddy and gross. I didn't have my jacket or umbrella because I'd packed them in my suitcase since we were leaving for Madrid, and the most important thing to have when leaving the country is your luggage. See? I listened. But that backfired, and I had to stand in the rain. We'd come from London to Paris, which also happened

to be the two cities in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, and I thought about that book a lot in the palace, particularly the parts about the prisoners during the war. This dreary weather reflected my current state, as if Dickens himself were writing my experience at the Palace of Versailles.

One of my biggest concerns was what would happen if I got my period in Europe. Before I left for Europe, I tried telling my friends at home about this fear and they thought I was being overdramatic and worrying unnecessarily. As I've gotten older, I've recognized instances from my adolescence where I was being ridiculous. This was not one of those times. Okay, trying to hang around my friends at school who had gotten their periods before I had to leave for Europe in the hopes that they could pass that on to me, like it's contagious, so I could get it over with before traveling was probably ridiculous. And then avoiding everyone at all costs who had theirs when it was too late for me to get mine over with before leaving, because I thought maybe I could postpone it an extra week was also kind of ridiculous. But the point of this story is to not dismiss the legitimate concerns of a premenstrual teenager, no matter how ridiculous her concerns may seem.

Despite my best efforts to outwit biology, I did not feel well walking through the palace with a combination of cramps and bloating that I didn't know was possible (was this a European thing?), while wearing my skinny jeans. All of which made me even more irritable, so I didn't say much while we were there. I didn't want to tell anyone about it because I was embarrassed and didn't want to draw attention to it. It didn't seem to make a difference to me that this was something out of my control and completely normal. But I'd fought this battle before, and I'd persevere and do it again. I was still determined to have the time of my life regardless of the fact

my freaking uterus had decided to tear itself apart and take me down with it. In the end, though, I sat on the palace floor because standing was taxing.

Sitting on the palace floor, my thoughts turned back to *A Tale of Two Cities* and the French Revolution. I thought about the people being executed with the guillotine during that whole Reign of Terror. Maybe they had to sit on the floor, contemplating their pain, too. Looking down, trying not to let the rest of my group see the agony in my eyes, I thought about all the bloodshed and murder that happened in Paris centuries ago, while sitting in a puddle of my own blood. My mind naturally wandered to thinking about Sydney Carton sacrificing himself, going to the guillotine for Charles Darnay so he could return to his wife and daughter. I wondered if this pain, tears, and feeling of helplessness was what the prisoners felt during the supposedly best of times and worst of times. They probably couldn't go explore the gardens, either. And I imagine they weren't in the best moods. I guess you could say we both ended our time in Paris at the Palace of Versailles. In a way, my experience at the palace became more authentic and drew me closer to a dark chapter of history by associating my pain with that of the thousands of people who were executed. I kept all those insights to myself and saved them for an overdramatic travel journal entry and now this section of my memoir.

Dramatics aside, I did eventually realize that Mother Nature's death grip on my uterus was not the end of the world, much like I'd already discovered in the U.S. The only difference was that I was in another country and didn't have the option to sit in my room away from people and nap because I had cities to explore. And since I was so panicked about what I'd do in the event of an emergency of this kind, I came prepared with supplies. But that doesn't mean the experience was any more fun, though. It still sucked. It also sucked for my roommate who unexpectedly got hers the next day and ran up to me at the elevator in a panic because she did not

come prepared. If I learned nothing else, this was a lesson about resilience in the face of adversity by taking some Advil for the pain and the importance of keeping feminine hygiene products on hand in a place that's easier to access than the passport holder.

Dora Didn't Prepare Me for This

March 26, when we arrived in Spain, was also when I became the most reliant on following other members of the group. The only Spanish I knew was the names of the colors from a song we had to sing in elementary school glee club. Watching *Dora the Explorer* as a child was not adequate preparation, especially when you consider the fact that she's lost most of the time. To complicate things even more, it seemed that no one in Spain knew English, either. I at least knew that even though I was only used to English, that didn't mean the rest of the world spoke it, too; however, that didn't make communication any easier. In addition to following closely behind Bea, I stuck close to Mrs. Roth, the Spanish teacher. I also didn't realize that the vast majority of us were French students; the three Spanish students were going to have to carry this team. Trying to hold my own was more of a challenge in Spain because if I thought I had no idea what was going on in the previous two countries, I was clueless now.

In Madrid we continued our pattern of experiencing the city in terms of the lifestyle, rather than on tourism alone. We followed in the Spaniards' footsteps and had *tapas* for dinner each night. *Tapas* felt like dining and dashing, even though we paid. We hopped from restaurant to restaurant, eating just a little bit at each one. I guess the idea was that if we did that long enough, we'd eat a whole meal and have worked it off walking to different restaurants. It also seemed more social, like the experience was about being with other people and spending time with them. Food was just a bonus. According to Bea, adults in Spain did that all night, staying out until five or six in the morning and sleeping late, then taking a nap in the afternoon so they can get ready to go out all night again. I felt like it would be more efficient to just eat at one place for the whole meal, but that could've just been me. No one in Spain ever seemed to be in a rush to get somewhere, so maybe they weren't concerned with efficiency. I don't know what the

underlying principles of the Spanish way of dining were, but the country in general seemed more relaxed in terms of, well, everything.

Needless to say, this was completely different from the lifestyle I was leading back home. This seemed like a far more exciting lifestyle than the one I was leading in southern Indiana where they'd yet to discover the genius of drinking Pepsi with lemon, like we do with water. I'd have to bring that revolutionary idea to the U.S. People deserved to know what they were missing. My favorite part of the Spanish dining experience was the churro stop. Being in Madrid just reaffirmed my theory that dessert is good in every country, so if all else fails and you don't know what to order, go for the dessert. Hardly ever does dessert turn out to be intestines or have eyes looking back at you. Chocolate is chocolate, and I'll make the bold assumption that it's good in every country. I could get used to the late-night churros dipped in chocolate.

I could also get used to being able to leave work in the middle of the day for *siesta*, where people got to close up shop, rest, then reopen whenever they felt like it; and no one seemed to mind the inconsistencies in their business hours. What a way to live. I wished we could implement that in school. Not only had I not seen that in America, but I didn't recall seeing that kind of relaxed lifestyle in England or France, either. That's not to say that the lifestyles in England and France weren't more relaxed than what we were used to in America, but it was more obvious in Spain. I think the first time I experienced something close to that kind of lifestyle was when I got to college and could create my own schedule, though I'd hardly say it was a relaxing time. Alas, we didn't fully emulate the Spanish lifestyle while visiting Madrid because we had no time for naps, and by 10:00 p.m. everyone was too tired to go out. Plus, to quote Mrs. Anderson, "There are not family-friendly folk wandering about at this hour." And with that, we followed Bea back to the hotel.

That next day we went to one of the most notable locations in Madrid which was Plaza Mayor Square. There are quite a few squares in Madrid, and apparently my seventeen-year-old self didn't think to write down the name or any distinct details about the one we went to. But after a Google search, and relying on my memory of what the place looked like, I figured out that this should be the square we visited. The only other famous square I'd heard of, but had yet to visit, was Times Square, which I know for a fact was not in Spain. Plaza Mayor Square was more of a happening town square with a fountain where people just hang out throughout the day, eating some churros and talking with friends. Both Plaza Mayor Square and Times Square had people dressed in costumes, though. These were full on mascot costumes, like Disney World but ten times scarier.

My seventeen-year-old thespian self who came to school in her witch costume with the full green makeup on more than one occasion for various theme days was kind of afraid of the costume people. But, in my defense, this setting didn't seem to be one where you'd expect to find people in costumes. At Disney World, I expected it. I didn't anticipate seeing an off-brand Minnie Mouse with a sinister facial expression roaming Spain. And there's a reason Disney has the rule that actors cannot take off their heads while in character. The reason is not only does it ruin the illusion, it's also frightening to see a headless cartoon mouse. Granted, it was also frightening when the actors had the heads on because you had no idea who you were dealing with or what their actual facial expressions were.

At no point during our orientation to Spain did Bea mention the locals' penchant for dressing up as various cartoon characters in public. For all I knew, this was completely normal, and we were wildly unprepared because none of us had brought a costume along. Regardless, I felt as though I'd aged back at least a decade by hiding behind the grown-ups and my classmates

so as to not make eye contact with any costume. I just wanted to observe from a safe distance, partially because I was curious as to what we were witnessing and also because I wanted to be hyper aware of my surroundings. If I was on edge at this point, I can only imagine how I would have reacted if someone in a costume had walked up behind me.



The headless sailors were what really freaked me out. Yes, you read that right. Headless. Sailors. With floating hats. I was so shocked I wasn't even curious as to how one accomplishes such a feat. I also didn't know that if you try to take their picture, because you're so entranced by the floating sailor hats, they will gesture towards you with the "come here" index finger. I quickly learned that, and then I had to walk

over there, holding onto my classmate Brad's arm because I was still afraid. I gave the headless
Here I am, feeling so uncomfortable, with a

sailor some ^{headless sailor.} money and got a real picture with him, and the sailor made me wear the hat. I

just wanted to leave and only be around people who still had their heads attached and to go back to my plan of hiding behind the adults because this place was a zoo. But that's not even the most shocking thing I saw in this public square.

The most shocking thing I saw was Winnie the Pooh. The bear himself was hardly shocking at that point. In fact, it was the least bizarre costume in the square. But somewhere, somehow, this Winnie the Pooh had acquired a yellow balloon sword. I don't recall seeing anyone making any sort of balloon animals in this square. To quote my awkward, seventeen-year-old self directly (in the travel journal only she would read, so she had no reason

not to be blunt, keep that in mind), “Let’s just say it was not being used for family-friendly viewing purposes.” I guess she assumed that any adult reader who could potentially come across her travel journal and read it at great lengths would be able to infer what she saw. I figured it was not a normal occurrence, even for this place, for



Here, I present some photographic evidence.

in public. It was indeed a public disturbance because all of a sudden two police cars raced up, followed by more officers on motorcycles. I have no idea where they came from. I got distracted between watching the indecent yellow bear and the person dressed as what I can only describe as a glittery donkey *piñata*. The police had to have a chat with Winnie the Pooh, probably about keeping it in his pants, but he didn’t have any pants, just a red T-shirt and a satchel.

To sum up our impression of the square during the middle of the day, our teacher Mr. Lewis said, “This place is sketchier than our local Walmart at midnight.” And that was coming from a real grown-up. I could only imagine what this place would have been like in the early hours of the morning after people had spent the night drinking. My hometown didn’t even have a town square for people to dress up as characters from children’s books and make obscene phallic gestures, so I definitely was exposed to many cultural differences. If I hadn’t picked up on this before, I learned that not all European countries have the same customs and that any preconceived notions I had of what Spain was like were not correct, at least in Madrid.



It wasn't enough for me to reenact statue poses at the Louvre, apparently.

I should point out that the only preconception I had of Spain, at the time, was of Barcelona from *The Cheetah Girls 2* movie. Since we did not visit Barcelona, that didn't help at all. I basically had no background knowledge on the Spanish language, culture, or history. I just knew that bullfighting was a thing, and we did see a bullfighting arena.

Looking back, I think I would have gotten more out of my time in Spain if I had done some preliminary research before going.

Bea did fill us in throughout our two days there about what we were seeing and the significance of it, but I wouldn't learn until my second trip abroad the difference having some background knowledge makes on the travel experience. Looking at things more optimistically, while I was in Spain my mind was essentially a blank slate and I built up my knowledge about Spain through hands-on experiences. But the observations and stories I have included in this chapter nevertheless came from an uninformed traveler, still combatting what she referred to as "cramps from hell," which probably hindered her observation skills. While my seventeen-year-old self had no idea what anyone was talking about, she was still eager to soak up the country.

I found that when we took our half-day trip to Toledo, on March 27, I saw the rural side of Spain, which coincided more with the way I envisioned it. By that I mean, it looked like the backdrop of a postcard. I guess I thought everywhere in Spain had lots of pretty flowers and great views of towns. flowers. Madrid was more metropolitan and felt dirtier than London and Paris. There was a lot of graffiti in interesting places that just made me wonder how someone got up there with a can of spray paint without being caught. Toledo, in my opinion, was more

picturesque and just felt nicer to me. But, in Toledo, you had to walk across cobblestones. I could see why the West eventually advanced to using concrete.

There were also escalators outside. I had no clue how that even worked. Spain out America-ed America with that one. But it was interesting to get to see the juxtaposition of the urban and rural sides of Spain, since we didn't get that in England or France. Even



"Wishing you were here. Best wishes from Toledo."

though I considered myself more of a city person, I enjoyed seeing rural Toledo more, probably just for the sheer fact that it coincided with my image of Spain from *The Cheetah Girls 2*.

As with the other countries, we went to museums in Madrid and Toledo where we relied on a tour guide to explain the exhibits. This is when the academic in me felt like she wasn't prepared in the slightest, like she blew off the reading and didn't bother to start the homework. That year, 2014, was the 400th anniversary of the Spanish artist El Greco's death, and we kept hearing about him and Francisco Goya. But I had no idea what our temporary Spanish tour guide (whose name I either didn't catch, couldn't spell or say, or forgot, so we'll just call her Maria), was talking about. Maria was with us during the day, mostly through the museums, talking about all the famous art I'd never heard of before. What was the big deal about Romantic or Renaissance paintings? They were all just pictures of people or landscapes to me. They were good paintings, but I had no further thoughts about them. I remember Maria giving us a lot of information about the artists and the work that we were seeing and that I generally wanted to learn. Like Bea, she had lots of information to share with us and was passionate about the art. Maria gave us lots of facts about the art, but I couldn't tell why any of it was important. Again,

we only saw Maria for a brief period of time, so we didn't form a strong connection with her, nor did we have a lot of time to ask questions.

I also don't think I was in the right mindset for a day of art museums. I already wasn't a huge fan of visual art and I was still waiting for that all-important Advil to kick in to calm down the cramps, so keeping up with the group wouldn't be such a trial. In my head I figured I'd either power through the pain or get lost in a foreign country and be trapped forever. That is how I learned that my fear is stronger than my pain. I was just trying to make it look like I was interested, giving the occasional smile and nodding to show I was listening. All the while I was probably longing for us to leave, but not wanting us to leave because I knew our time in Europe was almost over, so I should make every moment count.

I've Cried in Four Countries

My first European trip ended as it started: following our chaperones to the metro to go back to the hotel. At the metro station, Mrs. Anderson asked me, "So Julia, what was your favorite part of the trip?" I tried to think of an answer but couldn't decide. I started to cry. Again. My travel journal reads, "Bea said this has never happened before; she hasn't experienced one of her travelers burst into sobs on the metro before." I personally found that hard to believe. How were people not being moved to tears when they were surrounded by these beautiful places? Especially if they knew that in less than 24 hours they'd be back in middle of nowhere Indiana with nothing cool. But I figured that other people were better at managing their tears or just flat out didn't have them. I didn't say I understood those tearless people, but I believed they existed. Everyone tried to make me feel better about having to go home by hyping up prom and senior year, but neither of those held a candle to the excitement of traveling Europe. Those eight days spent exploring places I'd only seen in movies and books, understanding that the world does extend beyond Indiana and the United States, beat going to school any day. And that's coming from a girl who genuinely loved school and learning. I had just gotten used to Europe, and now I had to leave. I didn't want that. I thought I could fit in over there, if for no other reason than that they seemed to enjoy theatre as much as I did.

This entire trip I thought about wanting to remember everything and everyone. On my last night in Europe I stayed up late writing a letter for Bea, telling her how grateful I was for this experience and everything she did for us. I knew that it was better for me to write it down because if I had to pour my heart out in the middle of a public place, there would have been far more tears. This way she could also keep the message forever to reread whenever she wanted. And maybe she'd remember me when this trip was just a distant memory.

Bea packed us breakfast to eat once we got to the airport. She also wrote superlatives about us and read them aloud to us while we were on the bus. She announced that I was “most likely to need waterproof mascara and to take home a Spanish husband who shares the same passion.” Yup, the tears started early on March 28 and the mascara probably ran. Update: I’ve still yet to find that Spanish husband, although that could be because that I have yet to return to Spain. After I checked my bag at the airport, I gave Bea my letter and nearly cried again. After the “aws” she said, “No more tears; go have breakfast with the group.” Following her instructions one last time, I turned and walked away from her to rejoin my fellow Hoosiers.

Goodbyes in general were hard for me. Introductions I was also wary about. But I thought I was especially good at the middle. I’m speaking here about my interactions with people, but I think it also applies to my relationships with England, France, and Spain. While I was crying on the Metro, I was pretty sure my group thought I’d purposefully not get off the Metro because I didn’t want to leave. But if they knew me at all they’d know that I was terrified of being left on my own in a foreign country. Bea was going to South Africa for two weeks and Mrs. Berry jokingly suggested she just take me with her, then my travel fun wouldn’t have to end. I wasn’t completely joking when I said, “Please take me with you! I’ll move in!” This plan wouldn’t have worked, though, because Mrs. Anderson would’ve found me and dragged me back home. If we consider the fact that I had strong feelings about not wanting to leave Europe during a time of heightened emotions, thanks to my period, it was amazing I held it together as well as I did.

During that first visit to Europe, I found a part of myself that I didn’t know I was searching for, the part that was her own grown-up self getting ready to take over. I thought I was going on a fun spring break trip. I didn’t think that I would make such strides in my

independence, especially since I was dedicated to sticking by an adult at all times because surely, I couldn't handle being on my own. Somehow in the process of following the adults, following the paths of history, and following some of my favorite characters, I discovered more about myself in relation to the world. I thought about the paths I still wanted to follow and the ones I wanted to forge. But I still had to learn about trusting myself to hold my own in this world, in the U.S. and in Europe, without having to look to someone older for instructions or approval. Learning how to navigate a new place and how to take care of myself prepared me for the next big change I'd encounter: college. The conclusion of my travel journal ended randomly and abruptly, as though I just stopped writing because we had to board our flight. But this was not the conclusion of my international travels. This trip showed me that I had ambition and that even if I was afraid to do something, I still did it. It was okay to be afraid of these new experiences, so long as that didn't stop me from having them. That got me through my first trip to Europe, moving on to college, and my next two trips to Europe.

ITALY 2016

Pre-Travel Journal

My seventeen-year-old self continued to grow after visiting Europe as a junior in high school. I had all of senior year, graduation, and the first year of college to present me with new opportunities for growth. At this point in the narrative, I had grown into a nineteen-year-old college student about to travel to Italy in May 2016. I was studying Theatre Education and English Education at Ball State University and had made the best friends I have ever known. My passion for all things literary and theatrical had only grown. I was also much more independent, but the road to that current state of independence was a little rocky. Adjusting to college was more difficult and scarier than I anticipated. There's a lot more to college than just the academic scene, even if you're a hardcore scholar. You also have to figure out who you are and become an independent individual. But I'd survived the first year and was looking forward to experiencing another trip of a lifetime with one of my Honors classes.

Prior to my two weeks in Italy, I spent the spring semester of my freshman year in an Honors colloquium class that covered Rome and Florence, Italy. We spent the semester studying the history, art, and architecture in preparation for a two-week field study in which we'd get to experience the cities firsthand. Our professors, Ms. Dalton and Dr. Ruebel, told us that the goal was for us to be informed travelers, as opposed to wandering tourists unaware of everything they were soaking in. I had never dedicated this much time to studying a place before visiting, not even places in the United States. I guess it had never crossed my mind to do that before going to Europe in high school, as evidenced by my lack of knowledge of Spanish history and culture. Granted, in high school I was busy with my classes and extracurricular activities, so I probably didn't have much time to research. Learning about Rome and Florence was my schoolwork now, and I had the opportunity to correct that misstep from my first trip to Europe.

Ms. Dalton told us that while we were abroad we would be writing travel journals that we would give her once we returned to the U.S. We were supposed to write about what we did and all of the intelligent revelations we had in the process to show that we learned something and could reflect on it. She said that we should not record every action of the day and our journal shouldn't look like this, "7:12 woke up, 7:15 brushed teeth, etc." I thought about starting off with that just to be that kid, but it sounded like more work than it was worth. We were supposed to focus on a couple of key points throughout the day, things that stood out to us and elaborate on why they stood out to us. She told us to write it for our future selves when we're thirty and want to reminisce about our time in Italy. But at the same time my brain was thinking, "Yeah, but present-day Ms. Dalton will be reading this before future Julia will. So, you're also my audience and I kind of feel like I need to keep that in mind, which basically means try to not to sound stupid." Since I knew she was going to read it as well, I was trying to look all dazzling and impressive, while still being truthful, of course.

During our last class meeting before going to Italy, we were supposed to have written a pre-travel journal with our goals that we set for ourselves in Rome and Florence. I showed up with mine typed out in the style of a legit journal entry, not just a bulleted list. I was determined that my future self would not be embarrassed by my nineteen-year-old self's writing, as I was already cringing at what my seventeen-year-old self wrote. I added some extra personality to my journal, which means I was probably trying to be funny. While we were in class I was thinking if someone else read it, it would probably look weird to them. As this inner monologue played out, Ms. Dalton asked me to read mine aloud.

I started off by saying, "Okay, so I think my main personal goal, which I do realize that may be unachievable, is to not get terribly lost. I know Ms. Dalton said we'll get lost, but I can

dream, can't I?" It seemed that my fear of being separated from everyone and being legitimately lost forever carried over from my high school trip to Europe. In my defense, this fear had been pounded into my head for years because on all of my school field trips the teachers and chaperones made it explicit that you were to stay with the group, to avoid getting lost. I listened because I thought getting lost sounded frightening because stranger danger isn't just a convenient rhyme, kids. But our professors weren't worried about losing us forever. I guess they had far more confidence in us than I had in myself. I still needed directions to get from my dorm to the football stadium, so how was I going to navigate Italy by myself?

Ms. Dalton and Dr. Ruebel encouraged us to venture off on our own, which sounded like the craziest suggestion I'd ever heard. Going off by ourselves in a country we've never been to? They said to travel in small groups, not completely alone because that was still a bit too extreme. Unlike my 2014 trip, there were going to be multiple occasions in which we were unsupervised in a foreign city. Our professors granting us this independence was exciting and daunting. I think my nineteen-year-old self's thought was that if I were with a small group and we got a little lost trying to find something, that would be okay because we could probably put our heads together to figure it out. But I didn't want to purposefully get lost as some of my other adventurous, dare I say wild, classmates wanted to do. I was hoping that I wouldn't be the one in charge of navigating the city because that was a level of adulthood that I did not feel prepared for.

I was obsessed with this concept of being an adult, not just acting like one. Pulling from my knowledge from my Acting I class, I'd been acting like an adult for years; I was not actually being an adult, though. Our acting professor told us about the difference between acting and being, how truthful, authentic performances happen when the actor is being the role, not just performing the role. I wanted to authentically be an adult. Legally I was one. I was registered to

vote. I figured that being an adult meant being self-sufficient. I'd been taking care of myself, for the most part, for two semesters. I don't know why I thought it would be that different overseas. I took care of myself for those eight days abroad in high school just fine. The first year of college was hard, though, and as I look back I remember my nineteen-year-old self thinking that I was barely surviving, let alone thriving. After spending a year being challenged in terms of academics and independence, it makes sense that I was a little worn-down. I know now that I was thriving, but my nineteen-year-old self needed some convincing.

I was also nervous because my last trip abroad was two years previous and while I had been on an international flight before, I could not advise others enough to ask someone other than me about how to navigate an airport. As we prepared for the trip, I sat in class wondering how in the world I was supposed to do any of the necessary pre-departure things. This was just like those pre-departure meetings we had in high school, only now I didn't have parents to get the information and be responsible for me. I was in charge of me. That was frightening. Sometimes it still is. But I sat there, and I listened and then texted everything to my parents to triple check that everything was in order. At that point I was probably thinking that the only thing I had going for me was that I already had a passport. It turns out that organizing everything that I was personally responsible for before going to Italy was not as difficult as my worried self thought it would be. I just kept reminding myself that everything would work out and once we got there it would be the trip of a lifetime.

Since this was my first time overseas for a study abroad, rather than vacation, I also had some academic goals written down. Again, I was trying to look dazzling and impressive, while still being authentic. I said, "We've talked this semester about observing space and how it's used, and I want to apply what we've learned to the real places. I want to take in and understand what

these places mean to people that live there now and what they were originally intended for.”

There are so many places that people just visit because they’re tourist attractions. I wanted to focus on what the use is for these places now, other than for people to visit to say they’ve been there. I didn’t want to look through the pictures from this trip and wonder what this building was or why I took a picture of that sign. There are many pictures from my 2014 trip of places that I knew hardly anything about. This time I was going to understand what I saw on a deeper level and form meaningful connections with these places.

I also wanted to take in the art we studied in class more thoroughly once we saw it in person, rather than on the projector screen. I think that says something about my growth as an artist and as someone who appreciates all art because I still was not into visual art. I just didn’t get what was so great about the brushstrokes. But over the course of my class, looking at countless pieces of art, my professors and classmates wore me down and now I love paintings. I still wasn’t that confident in my ability to analyze the paintings, but I was definitely doing better than I was at seventeen. I knew that we were going to see renowned artwork and I didn’t want to go through the museums not “getting it” as I did in high school. This time when I reenacted statue poses, I wanted to know what I was imitating.

Finally getting to the end of the pre-travel journal I read, “And I realize this is really cliché, but I just want to make a lot of amazing memories. This is such an amazing opportunity that I’ve been waiting about a year (and my whole life) for and damn it I’m going to make the most of it.” I think that was the first time I swore in an academic assignment. I was also a mature young adult who recognized the importance of making the most of this experience.

Then I added some extra goals three days later that: “I would love to be able to work through my tiredness (is that even a word?) and be as pleasant as possible during the death



I'd like to thank my dad for taking this pre-departure picture for me.

march." The death march, as defined by Ms. Dalton, was the morning we got off the plane in Rome and immediately proceeded to march through the city, checking off important stops from our list. I think this goal was more intended to benefit my fellow travelers rather than me, as I'm not a morning person. One day later, May 10, 2016, I put on my white Vans, met everyone at the airport, and took a group picture so we could fly to Rome and start working on those travel goals.

On this second trip to Europe, I had a better idea of what

to anticipate from the travel process itself and what to anticipate in terms of this specific trip, despite my doubts. I knew that I was

bound to learn so much that in the moment I wouldn't even realize how much I learned. I expected to learn when I went to Europe in high school because it felt inevitable with all the museums we visited and tours we took through the city. This time, though, I understood more about how travel would change me and the opportunities for learning that I'd be presented with.

Perhaps the best quote from my pre-travel journal was, "I want to take advantage of the opportunities to gain knowledge that you can only find from actually going there." I still felt like I needed someone to help guide me toward those opportunities, and, luckily,

we had Ms. Dalton to lead us. I figured that



Here is most of our class, ready for adventure!

following Ms. Dalton, as I had followed Bea, would put any lingering worries to rest. I would follow her while following in the footsteps of the great Italian artists, thinkers, and writers and hopefully learn to become more independent in the process.

Dear Future Julia (and Present-Ms. Dalton)

I've already mentioned that Ms. Dalton was my professor for the Rome and Florence class, but to fully understand the magnitude of her influence on my travels, and subsequently my life, I need to tell you a bit more. The Rome and Florence class was the fourth class I had taken with her that year; she also taught my integrated humanities class with Dr. Ruebel, so she had to put up with me for six hours a week that year. What Ms. Dalton didn't know about me when we met in August 2015 was that a few months ago I had left my role model and my favorite teacher, Mrs. Hines. She was the one who taught me theatre and was appalled I hadn't packed. I bonded with her over my four years of high school, and I was afraid that I wouldn't have someone like her at college. When I arrived at Ball State I was a vulnerable eighteen-year-old hoping I'd find someone to fill those shoes but wasn't sure I'd be successful. Enter Ms. Dalton.

I think that she came into my life at the perfect time when I needed someone like her as I was trying to adjust to the first year of college and being away from everything familiar. I feel so lucky that I had these two women to guide me through two different times in my life. Before we even left the country, I wanted to metaphorically follow in Ms. Dalton's footsteps because I'd spent the whole academic year getting attached to her, essentially. She inspired me as a teacher and I wanted to be for my students what she already was for me.

What stood out to me the most was that she always encouraged us to ask questions. This seems like such a simple concept, to ask questions. As kids, we ask hundreds of questions a day; but somewhere during adolescence we stop doing that because asking questions surely meant that we were dumb and didn't understand. One of the greatest lessons I learned in Ms. Dalton's class is that asking questions is what makes us human, and asking questions makes us smarter. So, whenever we would ask a question, she would follow-up with, "That's a good question, and I

think it's important that we ask it." And then we'd explore the question and come up with some answers. That validation, especially during a time when I was more hesitant to speak up in class, meant a lot to me, and to the rest of my classmates. We started saying, "That's a good question, and I think it's important that we ask it" to each other for the most random questions as a joke, but deep down it meant that we were doing something right.

Ms. Dalton also put up with my sass, my freshman year sass, mind you, as I was still trying to figure out what I could get away with. My upperclassman sass became far stronger. She sassied me right back. And I totally deserved it. That's when I knew we had a real bond, which, of course, I was excited about considering the fact that I looked up to her so much and wanted her to like me as well. Hence, the desire to be dazzling and impressive, knowing she was going to read my travel journal. It wasn't just my professor reading it to see how I applied what I'd learned all semester to visiting Rome and Florence. This was my professor who had become my role model reading my personal narratives full of my thoughts and feelings and funny quips.

Having already reread my high school journals, embarrassed at how awkward I was, I didn't want to repeat that with the longer travel journals that Ms. Dalton had to read. It was one thing if I read my writing and was embarrassed by it, but I desperately wanted to avoid her reading the awkwardness, thus making me look less than dazzling or impressive and adding another layer to my humiliation. I used the same physical journal that I wrote my high school travel experiences in to write my Italy journal because I like to hand write my travel journals. But that meant that Ms. Dalton could easily flip back to the beginning and read my high school journals. I mentioned to her that I wasn't able to stop her from reading them, but she should know that I was seventeen and an inexperienced writer and traveler. She reassured me there would be no judging, and I hope the ones she read were at least somewhat amusing.

In my Italy travel journal, I made sure to acknowledge both of my audiences and introduced each entry with, “Dear Future Julia and Present Ms. Dalton.” I guess my nineteen-year-old self secretly wanted to write an epistolary novel but didn’t know it. Basically, I wrote the same letter addressed to the two of us about what I did that day. My nineteen-year-old self liked to break the fourth wall and give a lot of side notes on what was happening. I also wrote a lot of “Notes to Present Ms. Dalton,” as if the current commentary wasn’t enough to tell her what we were doing.

To my knowledge, Ms. Dalton planned everything for the trip on her own. And she did a heck of a job pulling that off. I often wondered to myself how someone knows how to do all of this and orchestrate all the events and people, especially when a lot of those people are confused college students. I worried that she thought she didn’t do enough for us, but I’ll make it known here that she did more than enough. She quite literally guided us through Italy, all of us following closely behind. We quickly learned that she was calling the shots and when she walks, you walk. But she also encouraged us to head out on our own to exercise that independence she kept saying we had.

One of the most prominent memories I have of interacting with Ms. Dalton in Italy was the time we talked about being teachers. We were walking through Rome, going who knows where, and I was at the front of the group because I was still determined not to lose my peers; so, I figured the best way to do that was to stay by the teacher. Plus, I’m a fast walker and I just could not walk in the back with all the slow pokes. But anyway, we happened to start talking about being teachers and I remember she said to me: “I hope that no one has ever told you that you’re wasting your intelligence by becoming a teacher, because that’s not true. And we don’t want dumb people teaching the kids!”

I laughed, and my inner monologue was “Wait! That means I’m not dumb; I’m smart! She thinks I’m smart! I can teach the kids because I’m not dumb!”

Then I actually replied with, “No, no one has ever said that I was like too smart to teach. I did have someone tell me that I was too smart to pursue theatre, though. And after a year of theatre school I know that that’s impossible because it’s so difficult that you need to be smart to do it well.”

Hearing her tell me that it makes her so happy to know that I’m going to be teaching the kids made my life. If I had any doubts that first year, and I’m sure I did, about whether I had what it takes to be a teacher, they went away in that moment. That’s not to say that I don’t ever have doubts about myself or my teaching, but from that moment on I knew that Ms. Dalton thought that I would be a great teacher.

I think that talking with her throughout the trip in a different setting, both in terms of the country and because we were not in a traditional school environment, helped me become more of an adult as we were on a more equal playing field. I have strong memories of talking with her at breakfast almost every morning before our group embarked on the day’s adventures. Now, I’ve already mentioned that I am not a morning person. But, I had it in my head that if I was in a foreign country that I may never get to visit again, I was going to be awake and doing something. So, I would get up and get ready long before any of my roommates, or any of the other nineteen-year-olds for that matter, and head downstairs to soak up Italy, even if it was just in the hotel. Even if I was up late the night before laughing with my roommates or writing my extensive travel journal, I would be downstairs bright and early ready for adventure. I could sleep when I’m dead. Also, I was pretty used to functioning without sleep since I was working on two majors and the Honors courses and trying to fit in another minor.

Since I was usually one of the only students up, I hung out a lot with the grown-ups in the morning. We had a total of four grown-ups with us in Italy: Ms. Dalton and her husband, John, and Dr. Jason Powell and his wife, Kris. Technically we were all grown-ups, because everyone was over eighteen, but I at least considered the four older adults to be the real grown-ups. At nineteen I was technically still a teenager, which I took to mean I wasn't a real grown-up, for whatever reason. Maybe the real grown-ups assumed we were real grown-ups, too. My knowledge of social conventions told me that I should not sit by myself like a loner because that looks weird. Instead, you're supposed to sit with the other people you know, which in this case was all adults. But luckily for me, I've always been pretty comfortable around adults, even when I wasn't considered an adult myself. And these were cooler adults, like the ones I enjoyed hanging out with when I was seventeen. I liked fifth-wheeling the adults. It felt like we were all equals, unlike those family functions where I just wanted to hang around my parents and they told me to just go play. I was one step closer to authentically being an adult by having these established adults accept me into this social sphere. They were also very entertaining. I sure hope



On our last full day in Italy, Ms. Dalton and I matched.

I was entertaining. I remember laughing a lot, and much of that I think was at my own expense.

After traveling across Italy for two weeks, I learned that to be like Ms. Dalton, I should be myself and by that, I mean an independent woman who can get things accomplished, although I was probably still trying to be similar to her, because I think she's awesome. While we were in Italy, Ms. Dalton noted how it's always interesting to get to know students

outside of class and she enjoys getting to know them as real people. I wrote in one of my various side notes that we also enjoyed getting to know her as a real person, not just the one assigning the readings and telling us to write about them. She wrote on a sticky note, which she placed over my side note, that we were a great group to travel with.

I will definitely add her name to my list of inspirational women who helped me grow into the woman I am now, who I am glad to call one of my old friends.

Strangers' Vans, a Stabbing, and Alcohol: Challenge Accepted

I thought back to my first international flight and how I couldn't sleep, which made the jet lag so special, and if I learned anything from that experience it was that I wanted to sleep on the way to Rome. I mentally psyched myself up and determined that this death march would be my Everest, and not only would I conquer it, but I'd do so in a way that made it wish it never challenged me. Somehow, I miraculously slept on the plane to Rome and subsequently became skilled in the art of sleeping in odd places while sitting up. The boy sitting next to me had a copy of *The Great Gatsby* with him. I didn't see him actually reading it, though. But that could be because I was asleep for most of the time. Now I'll never know if he did read it, or if he enjoyed it, and all of those potential conversations we could have had on the plane went to waste.

I was on the aisle, so every time someone got up to go to the bathroom they had to walk by me, as I slept. They were jealous. Suckers. While beating out my classmates in terms of who slept the most on the plane wasn't one of my initial goals, I can't say that I didn't enjoy that. I think we landed at about seven or eight in the morning and I had never been more ready to wake up in my life. And that's coming from a non-morning person. Either I got a lot of sleep or not enough because it felt like I'd already taken a shot of espresso when we got off the plane. I guess the excitement of travel had taken over. Meanwhile, everyone else was nearly dead to the world, hence the term "death march." Julia-1. Death march-0. Also, I was super proud that I'd conquered another plane ride and did not come anywhere near to throwing up. The same could not be said for others. Julia-2. Everyone else in that airport- 0.

But don't let this sudden bout of confidence in my travel abilities fool you. I still didn't have a clue as to what I was doing. I didn't speak any Italian that was not "thank you," "please,"

“pizza,” “pasta,” or the numbers one through ten. This is when the staying with the herd mentality kicked in, so I had no choice but to blindly follow Ms. Dalton and go where she led us.

During my senior year of high school, I learned about the dangers of blind obedience, as illustrated by the Milgram experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment. But I threw all that out the window once we landed in Italy because blindly following those in front of me was how I survived. Now, I will admit I was a little hesitant to follow Ms. Dalton when the first thing we did after leaving the airport was climb into strangers’ white vans. This was an after school special waiting to happen, and I didn’t even grow up in an era where after school specials were popular. What do you do when the trusted adult is the one putting you in the van? Apparently, you blindly obey and hope for the best. I can’t even remember how we found these drivers or if Ms. Dalton knew who or what she was looking for. I think the other five people in our van must have been too tired to contemplate what they would do if we ended up in a *Taken* situation but I, however, was not. After Ms. Dalton got in our van I said from the back, “Current travel journal update: got off the plane and am now writing this from the back of a stranger’s van.”

I think our real worry should have been the fact that the roads were so narrow, and each driver was using as many extra electronic devices as possible instead of watching the road. In the U.S., we stress the importance of not being a distracted driver and urge drivers to put their cell phones away. In Italy, they didn’t seem to have that philosophy, despite the fact that traffic was nuts over there. It looked like no one bothered with turn signals, checking blind spots, or yielding to pedestrians. I never saw people on their phones while walking down the streets, eating at restaurants, going through museums, nope. The only time I saw locals on their cell phones was when they were behind the wheel of a car. I became more grateful for American traffic laws that first day in Rome and that I would not be driving over there.

There was something about walking outside the airport, then sitting in the back of a stranger's van, and knowing that we were in Rome. It was such a weird feeling to get down from the air and know that for the first time in two years I was in a different country, an ocean away from home. My inner monologue: "Holy cow. We are in another continent. We've left America behind us and we're in the place where history began. Or at least where the curriculum starts for history class in the schools I attended." And we were there to stay for longer than two days, so I could really get to know the country. Looking from the van window, I kept thinking, "Wow these interstates really do look like ours at home." But yet they felt so foreign simply because we were on another continent. Being in Rome for only a few hours brought back the same excitement I felt during my first trip to Europe where every mundane thing seemed fascinating, only this time I didn't feel the need to take pictures of it all.

That first day in Rome Ms. Dalton told us that we wouldn't remember much of what happened during the death march. For that day's journal, she suggested to write about one or two specific things that we noticed. But my stubborn, determined-to-beat-the-death-march brain responded with, "Challenge accepted." I decided I would write down every single thing I saw, did, noticed, etc. Seven pages of a travel journal later, the challenge was complete.

Those seven pages consisted of us trekking through the city. All. Over. The. Cobblestones. Yeah, they weren't kidding when they said this city was old and authentic and whatnot. The most significant site, to me, that we encountered on our first day was the Theatre of Pompey, or as I knew it, the place where the assassins stabbed Caesar. After I stopped making *Mean Girls* references, I was thinking, "Holy crap this city is real. Caesar was real. Like, those history textbooks were showing us real stuff." Even after my trip to Europe in 2014, I still didn't think I had many connections to the Old World. We had no evidence in the U.S. from the Roman

Empire or from the Crusades; so how was my eleven-year-old self supposed to connect with that in school? Learning about Ancient Rome as a kid left me with a lot of questions, mainly: what of this was real? When we learned about history and mythology I had a hard time distinguishing who actually existed, and it took me longer than I'd like to admit to finally figure out what events were real. But at nineteen I knew that Caesar was real. Figuring that out was like those Christmas stories where the kid starts to lose faith that Santa Claus is real, travels to the North Pole, and this affirmation that Santa is real leads to the best Christmas ever. Well, I'd spent most of my childhood questioning whether Caesar was real, and as an adult I traveled to where he was stabbed, which sure validated his existence and made for the best trip to Rome ever.

I finally made a connection with a part of history that I thought fictional for a while and could envision this event in my head. I wondered what Shakespeare envisioned when he wrote *Julius Caesar* and if he'd also visited this spot. When I thought about the assassination of Julius Caesar previously, for some reason, I didn't picture it happening outdoors. I was probably picturing a Hollywood adaptation taking place in a palace whose architecture wouldn't be invented for a few millennia. I didn't realize how skeptical I was at the validity of what I learned about Ancient Rome until I was at the ruins and everything started to look believable. There was also something about standing there, knowing that people had been walking there for thousands of years and making the connection that we were inadvertently following their footsteps. I made sure not to follow in the murderers' footsteps, but the other people, the average citizens just taking a stroll by the Tiber River, I totally followed. I knew nothing of these average citizens whose paths I walked, and they had no idea I'd be walking there thousands of years later. In a way I got to connect not only with this place in the city, but with the people history forgot. It makes me wonder if someone will follow my footsteps there and if they'll know who I was. If

nothing else, I guess the future Honors classes that visit Rome will follow in my footsteps. I couldn't make this type of connection by looking at pictures or even reading about Rome. This type of connection could only be made by traveling. And this was just the start of our first day; by no means did the learning stop there.

Right off the bat, day one, we exercised our independence (and our temporary legality). We set off on our own in small groups for lunch and I was a big girl and I took a sip of red wine. My first sip of red wine, or any alcohol for that matter. How scandalous, I know. My initial response was, "Does it always burn like that?" Judging by the laughs I got from the other people at our table, I guessed that I'd made a really naive statement and any hope of appearing like I was an educated drinker was out the window. I hadn't had alcohol before, so this was an important moment for me as I journeyed toward adulthood. My parents only drank on special occasions and they didn't allow me to drink at home since I was underage. Being a hardwired rule follower, I didn't try alcohol until I was of legal age in Italy and we were told that it was fine if we drank, just please do so responsibly. I figured the fine wines of Italy wouldn't be a bad introduction, and if the point of the trip was to experience things I couldn't by staying at home, mission accomplished.

But I was getting so curious about what all the fuss was about with drinking, so I decided that after my nap, when we headed out for dinner as a group, that I'd graduate to my own glass of wine. This red wine still burned, and I didn't finish it. I didn't know how much a person had to drink for the effects to kick in, and I was trying to keep the composure of a sophisticated young adult. I had no intention of being irresponsible because if being clueless about what I was doing in a foreign country while sober worried me, I sure didn't want to see what it would be like to lose control over myself. Looking back, I didn't even think about how much of a leap that was

for me to venture into the unknown and drink without knowing the consequences. Obviously, I would've stopped myself if I thought it was getting out of hand or I got scared, which is partially why I didn't finish the glass. And I must have placed a lot of trust in the friends I was with to guide me through what I made into a personal milestone during this trip.

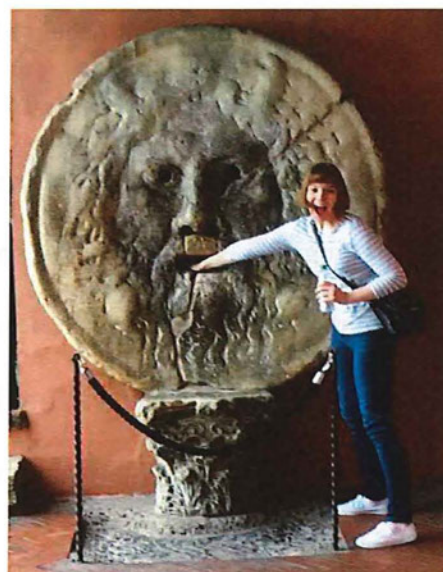
For the rest of the evening I was all, "I'm such a grown up; I just drank responsibly." I took "drink responsibly" to mean not getting drunk or letting alcohol have even the slightest effect on me. I only had to answer to myself in that regard. The Italian laws were fine with me drinking, our adults understood that students would probably drink a little, and I started to believe I was fine with it. Even so there was this tiny part of my brain that kept wondering what my parents would say about this. But I don't remember them telling me not to drink while I was over there. And they weren't going to be reading my travel journal. I did put a disclaimer there, though, for Ms. Dalton about how responsible I was being and how I didn't drink illegally at home, so this really was my first experience with alcohol, and how I didn't just write that because I knew she was reading my journal. I wanted her to know the truth and to write an authentic narrative because I was sure my thirty-year-old self would want to remember this experience. But I didn't have to tell my parents anything when I got home. In all honesty, I told them on the car ride home from the airport, so that secret didn't stay secret for long.

I guess it was the stigma placed on drinking that had been pounded into my head, but I did feel like a rebel even though it was totally legal, and I was by no means doing something crazy. Now that I can legally drink in my home country, I'm glad that my introduction to alcohol was in Europe. I learned about drinking by observing European culture, where drinking is a social activity and people aren't drinking for the sake of drinking. The attitude, in Italy at least, surrounding the consumption of alcohol was not promoting inebriation. I liked that people could

drink with their friends and by the time the night was over they would likely still remember it the next day. When I arrived back in the U.S., I'd learned that I like wine and that I was irritated with being underage again. I'd already proved that I could be responsible with alcohol and being denied the opportunity to have it bothered me because now I knew what I was missing. Before, when I had no interest in drinking because it seemed the only way to do it was to get drunk as quickly as possible, I didn't care that I was underage. And I still didn't want to go out drinking all the time, but I would've liked the option.

I Just Wanted to be Audrey Hepburn

Our first day, post-death march, was May 12, the day I felt like Audrey Hepburn. That is, if Audrey Hepburn wore white Vans with skinny jeans that were secretly jeggings and the lightest weight shirt she could find because, damn, it was hot over there. At one point during the previous semester our class watched *Roman Holiday* and I was fascinated with it and determined I wanted to be as classy as Audrey Hepburn playing Princess Ann. Since I didn't want to follow in her character's footsteps by falling asleep on a bench and waking up in a strange man's apartment, I would gladly pretend to be Audrey Hepburn at the Mouth of Truth instead. The Mouth of Truth is this big relief sculpture of a face with an open mouth that tourists like to stick their hands in. The legend is that if someone puts their hand in the rock mouth and the rock doesn't cut it off, they're a truthful person. If they lose their hand to the Mouth of Truth, they're a liar. I wrote in my travel journal that night, with both my hands still intact, "I pretty much stuck my hand in as far as it would go. I guess I got cocky after watching the people before me not get their hand bitten off. I was probably a little bit too excited to stick my hand in a rock mouth. But it made me feel like Audrey Hepburn, so my goal was accomplished."



I was potentially about to lose my dominant hand to a rock.

I must have been determined to live out as many movies as possible (there's that theatre major showing through) because that same day we went to the Roman Forum; all I was asking for was for something funny to happen on our way there. I really don't think that was too much

to ask. I mean, it's not like I was asking everyone to start singing Sondheim on the way, or for there to be a case of mistaken identities, or a chariot crash. But the thing is, I don't remember if something funny actually happened or if I just took it upon myself to start laughing because I wanted to honor the authenticity of the place. I just remember laughing, but again, I don't know why. Either way, hopefully Stephen Sondheim heard about it and he's proud.

When I think back to our class, one of the first things I remember studying was the Forum. I remember Dr. Ruebel discussing it with us in great depth and on more than one occasion we were tasked with drawing the Forum from memory. Before I describe my experiences at the Forum, I wanted to say a quick word about Dr. Ruebel, not only because he taught us about the Forum, but because he taught us much more than that. He also taught our integrated humanities classes along with the Rome and Florence class. He had such a passion for Rome. I hadn't seen someone with a passion for a specific place like this in my life. He was originally going to travel with us that spring, but unfortunately his health didn't allow for that to happen. We thought of him fondly as we journeyed our way through the city, thinking about how he would have been in his element strolling through the Forum. We sadly lost him in October 2016. I will always associate him, and his legacy, with Rome and I am grateful for all the lessons he taught me.

Before the Forum was in ruins, and before we got a Tony Award-winning musical out of it, it was the place to be a few thousand years ago. I thought of the Forum as the place the ancient Romans went when they needed to "go into town." Back in the day, the Forum had places to shop, places to hold trials, various temples, streets for parades after a military victory, appropriately known as "triumphs," and many government buildings. But as our professors described the Forum to us, I found it difficult to picture it in my head, especially since all of the



This was my favorite part of the Forum:
Basilica Julia.

pictures were of piles of rocks. Not surprisingly, none of the maps I was forced to draw of the Roman Forum, with misshapen rectangles and labels haphazardly written on them, looked anything at all like it. The only part I got right was that everything was ruins. I wrote in my travel journal that, "Part of me still can't believe that we walked on history today." Now the Forum is in the middle of a modern city and it was weird to think that it once *was* the modern city. Everywhere we went we could find evidence of the 21st century and then casually stumble upon remnants of an ancient civilization.

We were at the Forum for a long time. Probably longer than it would take to watch *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. It was hot and we all needed to rehydrate. So apparently in Rome there are public water fountains on practically every street corner. Now, I don't want to give false information here; so, when I say "fountain," they were rusty looking pipes that continuously stream water into the street and there's a convenient drain near them, so there aren't floods. When we arrived in Rome, the adults were saying things like, "Guys, don't drink the water from the faucets! That could be bad and make you sick. Instead, fill up your water bottles from these rusty pipes in the middle of the sidewalk." This is another instance where I questioned my blind obedience and following what the adults said. But, again, I chose to trust them, and no one seemed to question drinking from the rusty street pipes.

But, running out of street water and sweating for hours at the Forum is enough to wear out a class of Honors students. It also didn't help that we felt like we were starving because

lunch ended up happening at about 3:00 p.m. We stayed at the Forum longer than we originally planned simply because it's such an expansive space. I don't remember how long we were there, but I know that an hour was definitely not long enough. Whatever dehydration or exhaustion I felt that afternoon I put aside when I heard a voice in my head saying that I didn't know if this was the only time I'd be here or see anything like it. Everything in the Forum had survived thousands of years of erosion and human interference, and we were allowed to walk through it. At the Forum, we were seeing everything in its natural state, more or less. This was such a different experience compared to looking at artifacts in the museum after they've been transported, maintained, and displayed in a particular room that could be on a separate continent from where the item was found. While I appreciate the accessibility of traveling exhibits, it's not like someone could have moved the entire Forum to the Smithsonian; and even if they did manage that, I think a lot of the authenticity would have been lost.

Our next stop that afternoon was the Colosseum and I learned that my sixth grade social studies knowledge was missing crucial pieces of information. The only background knowledge I had about Rome before this class was the Colosseum. By that, I mean I knew what it looked like and that it was in Rome. I don't remember ever being shown an image of what the inside of the Colosseum looks like and I didn't think to ask or take it upon myself to look it up. It's no wonder my younger self had a lot of false preconceived notions; I at least knew that the Colosseum was real and wasn't grappling with the question of its existence. I'm not convinced that my memories of learning about the Colosseum in school haven't been replaced by the memory of my friend Leah throwing up at the Colosseum. What a shame the director didn't think to include a scene where the princess' friend vomits by the Colosseum in *Roman Holiday*. Anyway, my point is

that I was missing background knowledge on one of the most iconic places in Italy, if not the world, so I had a lot to learn.

The Colosseum was an amphitheater space built to house pretty much anything to do with athletics and violence, such as gladiator combats. For whatever reason, I was expecting to just see this big open field with a bunch of bleacher seats that the ancient Romans would sit on to watch the gladiators. My vision of the Colosseum was just a modern-day arena but with seats made of stone. That's not what it looked like at all. There were different levels built in and I have no clue how visitors get to the lowest level, where the playing space would have been, but we did see people down there. This was one of the biggest challenges for me to envision what this space would have looked like thousands of years ago, since I had a solidified idea beforehand. Since it wasn't a big field, I wasn't sure how to picture the space without the modern aspects, filled with people wearing togas to watch some gladiators fight.

I wasn't expecting to see modernized portions of the Colosseum, but something tells me that the gift shop didn't date back to 500 B.C.E. I thought it would be all ancient, like the Forum. The Colosseum itself encapsulated both the ancient and modern worlds. Inside, we'd be walking through the modern, commercialized areas like the gift shop. Then we'd go outside and walk on different levels of stone from thousands of years ago. I also learned, as we walked around outside, that we will turn anything into a chair. I



I took this selfie inside the Colosseum.

don't know if it's just Americans or young people, or both, but I saw so many people just sitting on history. It's like they were thinking, "Oh, is that an old stone? Better sit on that."

The major revelation I wrote about the Colosseum was, "What really blows my mind about this city is that there are so many ancient structures among the modern aspects. Like you're driving down the street and you see the Colosseum and it's just the same old, same old. I mean, come on." I think this says a lot about the culture because for thousands of years society has seen the value in keeping these ancient structures, not tearing them down to build something modern and perhaps more convenient. The Romans integrated the city's history into its present, and I think this is hard to visualize in the United States because everything seems to be fairly modern, or at least not ancient. Rome's approach quite literally builds on its foundation and allows people to follow in the footsteps of those who came before them, especially if the city is insistent on not replacing the cobblestone streets. If the culture wasn't conducive to allowing multiple worlds to coexist, I think my experiences in Rome, and the city itself, would be very different.

By the next day, May 13, we'd spent a couple of days in Rome and were given the task of finding our way back to the hotel without the adults leading the way. This is where that fear of being perpetually lost flared up. The group I went with decided to walk the entire way back and someone, I know for sure it wasn't me, found a route on our map that seemed almost idiot-proof. I placed my trust in my classmates and started to walk back to the hotel. Apparently, one of the other groups decided to take the Metro back for at least part of the way and they thought that our plan was flawed. When Ms. Dalton told our group this, I believe I responded with, "I'll show *you*!"

"I'm not the one betting against you, here."

“Oh no, I didn’t mean you specifically. I just meant a collective you, meaning the other people who think we can’t do it. We’ll show them and now I’m more determined than ever to make it back just because they said it wouldn’t work.”

Our group walked with purpose on the way back, indirectly following the footsteps of our adults from the first few days. We tried to remember specific streets or landmarks we usually passed. As we worked together, we found familiar places and some new places when we deviated from the path to make a gelato stop. I had two. And I wasn’t even sorry. Throughout our independent navigation, we also learned that the traffic lights mean something completely different in Rome, at least for pedestrians at the crosswalks. I noted it in my travel journal for future reference and I’ll write it here for any future travelers, so you won’t have to make the same mistakes we did:

- “Green = Go (but don’t expect the cars to automatically yield the pedestrians, they must have more relaxed laws about hitting people with cars or mopeds).
- Yellow = Move Bitch (not to be confused with caution or yield like in the U.S. In this instance you should try to run through the yellow lights).
- Red = It’s About To Turn Green So Just Go Anyway (I think that one is pretty self-explanatory).”

Our plan was successful and we all made it back in one piece. I reveled in our strides in independence. In a way, I didn’t do much since someone else figured out the route to take. I just followed along and ate two ice cream cones. But that little victory meant a lot to me. If we found our way back once, surely, we could do it again. And it would only get easier the longer we were in the city. It had been such a productive day and I’d already seen and learned so much. And we

were still new arrivals trying to figure out what in the world we were even doing or where we were going. But now we knew that we could find our way back to the hotel, or at least to something familiar, and it was so liberating. We were actually being adults and succeeding at it.

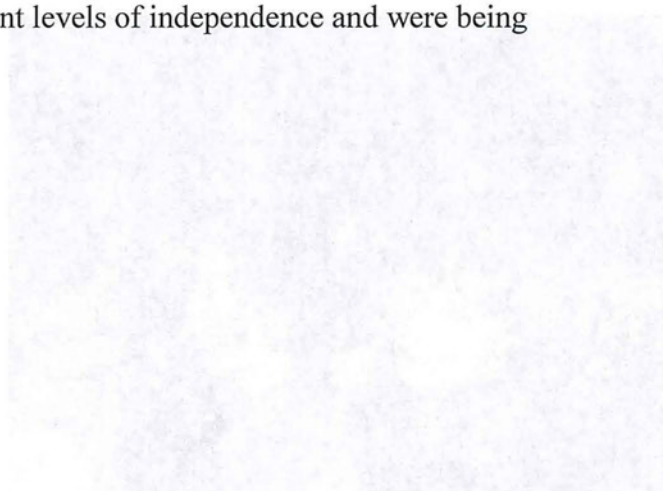
After a long night where my roommates, Leah and Debbie, and I spent hours laughing, we finally decided to go to sleep. Within a minute or two after turning off the lights, someone was pounding on our door. My initial thought was, “Oh my gosh, Ms. Dalton, what could you possibly want from us at this hour?!” What I actually said was, “I’ll get it” as I got up to answer the door, which Leah and Debbie told me sounded quite angry.

I didn’t have my glasses on, so I couldn’t tell who it was or what they wanted, but it was Caitlyn who had been looking for Anna. She said that she hadn’t seen or heard from Anna in hours and she was getting worried. Then I put my glasses on and was ready to put all my viewings of *Taken* to use. Caitlyn said that Anna replied to her Facebook message hours ago, but we didn’t know where she was now, if she had left the hotel again, or who she would have gone with. I pointed out that we should not discard the possibility that she had been taken and her captor stole her phone and was posing as her, responding to messages to give a false appearance of safety to make sure no one came looking for her. Leah, Debbie, and Caitlyn all looked at me with these horrified expressions and gave me a resounding, “JULIA!”

I guess they were not pleased with this grade-A detective work because it was “too morbid.” Leah threw out the idea that this was a *Monster House* situation, and Anna had been eaten by the hotel. We had done so well up to this point and now we might have lost a classmate after having only been in this country for a few days. All we knew was how to find the hotel; we couldn’t go on a search-and-rescue mission throughout Rome in the middle of the night. The pre-

departure plan did not cover what to do in the event one of your classmates disappears. The first step probably would have been to get one of the real adults, but we didn't get that far.

Anna was just hanging out with some of our other classmates in another room and didn't have very good cell service. Fortunately, we never encountered a real crisis of this kind, but I like to think that I could've actually helped. The next morning breakfast started off with Caitlyn saying, "Ms. Dalton, we thought we lost Anna last night!" I thought we were going to keep that under wraps, but I guess not. That's how I'd like to start my day, having one of my students tell me we almost lost another one on the day they were supposed to find their own way back to the hotel. Once we realized that there was never any real danger, it was funny. And since we didn't almost lose a classmate, we retained our current levels of independence and were being successful travelers.



I've Cried in Five Countries

My first significant cry in Italy happened because of my love for the performing arts. Most of us decided to go to Santa Maria del Popolo that evening to hear an abridged version of Handel's *Messiah*. Santa Maria del Popolo is a church in the Piazza del Popolo, and it has so many famous paintings in it that it could be a museum; but it was important to me throughout our time in Italy to understand that while these churches have lots of notable artwork, the intended purpose of the space is not to be a museum. That's not to say that I didn't admire the paintings, because I did. Anywhere I looked I could find enormous paintings unlike any of the artwork I'd seen in churches back home. There was just so much Baroque art everywhere. I felt surrounded



Thanks, Ms. Dalton, for getting this picture of Debbie, me, Caitlyn, and Chris minutes before the concert started.

by the fine arts in every sense that one could be surrounded. Going to this concert was one of the most uplifting, calming, and moving experiences I'd had on that trip and probably in my whole life. Every instrument and voice we heard was the sound of pure joy. I don't think I've experienced acoustics quite like those, but I wish we could get them in America because they were impeccable.

It was kind of hard to tell exactly what the singers were saying, though. There were also times when I wasn't sure if they were singing in English or Italian or something completely different. Some more enunciation would've appeased my particular theatre major self, but they were hitting the notes and the music sounded so pretty I couldn't focus on the negative. I've noticed about my theatrical self that when I go to a performance, I get excited not only by the

story being told, but by how well the anybody involved in the production performs. I didn't know any of these musicians or singers, but I was proud of them and I wrote in my travel journal, "They performed so well I constantly had chills. There was a point where I was so immersed in it I was oblivious to things around me. I couldn't believe it was over so quickly; granted, they did only perform half. It almost feels like a dream that this happened."

I cried from the moment it stopped because I didn't want it to be over. I decided it was not acceptable for something so beautiful to end. I looked over at everyone sitting around me with tear-filled eyes and asked with a wavering voice, "It's over? Is it really over?" This type of reaction was bound to happen; I was a theatre student who was also an easy crier. Plus, this was such a unique performance and experience that I'm not sure I'll ever have one like it again. The tears continued through the Metro station. Now I could say I've cried in five countries. And I love when performances make me cry because I felt it so deeply. I had never cried looking at a painting, but I could sob through an entire intermission of a musical because I thought it was that good. I wrote in my travel journal, "This was such a full day for me. It was so enriching and played to my artistic side in a different way than the visual arts did."

There is a light blue sticky note in my travel journal over this section where I describe my thoughts and feelings and all the crying. Ms. Dalton wrote, "Those are the right kind of tears!" When I read this note three months later, I smiled. It brought me back to the memory of crying as we walked through the Metro station to head back to the hotel that night because I still wasn't over my feelings. It probably looked like I was in distress, and I'm sure Ms. Dalton didn't want me to cry because I was sad. I took her note as validation of my tears and my feelings since I was crying mainly because of the music's beauty, not sadness. This validation also made me feel like I was somewhat following in her footsteps because I'd done something she approved of, even

though I didn't need anyone's permission to cry. I think I was also relieved she didn't think I was crazy and couldn't pull myself together. Even if she did, I was glad that I was moved to the point of tears because I took the crying as a sign that I understood the art.

When I was in high school, I always wanted to be immersed in the arts, and I didn't know what to expect when that finally happened in college. It was a big change for me to spend a year having to think critically about both visual and performing arts, rather than just experiencing them for fun. After my first year as a theatre major, instead of thinking about how much I knew about art, I was questioning if I understood anything artistic. Being at this performance of the *Messiah* reminded me how at the end of the day art is supposed to be beautiful and something we enjoy. I trusted that this performance resonated with me beyond the surface level, even if I wasn't watching through an analytical lens. And just because I wasn't watching the performance to analyze it, didn't mean that it didn't help me grow as an artist.

During this trip, I also had my first experience with Italian theatre, and though I didn't cry it was still a growing experience. On May 15, a classmate, Melissa, came around at breakfast, asking if anyone wanted to go see a play with her in the afternoon. Why do I feel I was the easiest target? Either way, I was excited to go and didn't even care what we saw. While the rest of our group saw more churches, Melissa, Shelby, Hannah, and I went to see *A Clockwork Orange*. The four of us found our way to the theater all by ourselves. We were big girls and didn't have any adults with us. We were the adults. We walked ourselves there, following our trusty Google Maps. The theater itself was so modern and not what I was expecting. I was expecting to see some exquisite opera house type venue. It was a huge space though with an enormous proscenium arch around the stage. I appreciated how wide the aisles were, so patrons

could get up without having to walk on top of people. I wish the American theaters would adopt that.

None of us had read the book, seen the movie, or even knew what it was about. We assumed the performance would be in English because that's the original language of the book. Plus, we thought some of the *Messiah* was in English, so maybe they liked to perform in English here? Nope. This play was all in Italian. We were dumb. At least we were smart enough to look up the synopsis on *Wikipedia* for the book before we went. We would have been completely lost had we not done that. I'm not sure if it was an Italian custom, or a European custom, but there was no program to tell the audience what was going on with the show, so if we thought we were going to quickly Google Translate something to get a better idea about what we walked into, we were wrong again. We were still lost because we never knew what anyone was saying, but we could deduce what part of the synopsis we were at given the actions.

From the synopsis of the novel I knew we were in for some twisted, creepy, messed up shit. I feel I should mention that my younger self, long before I was seventeen and going to Europe for the first time, used to have this preconceived notion that absolutely nothing at all inappropriate could or would be shown in live theatre because it's happening right in front of me. It's not like there's that extra distance from the story when there's a screen acting as the fourth wall for movies and television. That was 100 percent wrong. I had to learn that lesson the hard way. In my defense, all of the theatre I'd seen when I formulated this theory, probably around age twelve, was considered family-friendly. By the time I was nineteen, and majoring in theatre, I was well-aware that live theatre can and will be controversial, pushing the envelope with suggestive material. After reading the synopsis for *A Clockwork Orange*, I knew I was going to

see a story filled with content that would likely shock its audience, and I'd never seen a production quite like this in America.

The story is set in a dystopian world and follows the protagonist Alex, a teenager that gets arrested for his involvement in various crimes. He decides to participate in a government experiment to see if they can alter his mind, so he doesn't feel these violent inclinations, in exchange for an early release from prison. We saw violence, drugs, probably some foul language (again, we didn't speak Italian so who knows what kinds of words they used), a rape scene played out in slow motion, nudity, and more sexual assault. So yeah, this was definitely graphic and easily the most sexually explicit play I'd seen in America or Italy. I had no background knowledge on contemporary Italian theatre, either, so I just assumed it would be a similar theatre going experience to that in America. For the most part, it was, despite the language barrier. Since I couldn't understand the language, I just focused on the production elements and thought about how the creative team made the show come together.

Aesthetically, the show seemed like a combination of steampunk operatic dystopia, which wasn't how I imagined it. I'm not sure I had enough time to think about the story, especially since I hadn't read the novel, to create my own vision. I wrote pages and pages about what I noticed in terms of the production elements of this show. I'm just saying, I would've liked some brownie points for my theatre degree. If I wasn't a committed thespian before, I certainly proved it that afternoon. I was trying to remember everything from my script analysis, directing, and acting classes, wondering how these professionals made the choices to tell the story in this way. To this day I am still questioning why designers made the decision to have every character wear a gold costume at some point during the show. I had no idea what the color gold was supposed to symbolize, and I was honestly proud that I'd noticed this detail. When I came home,

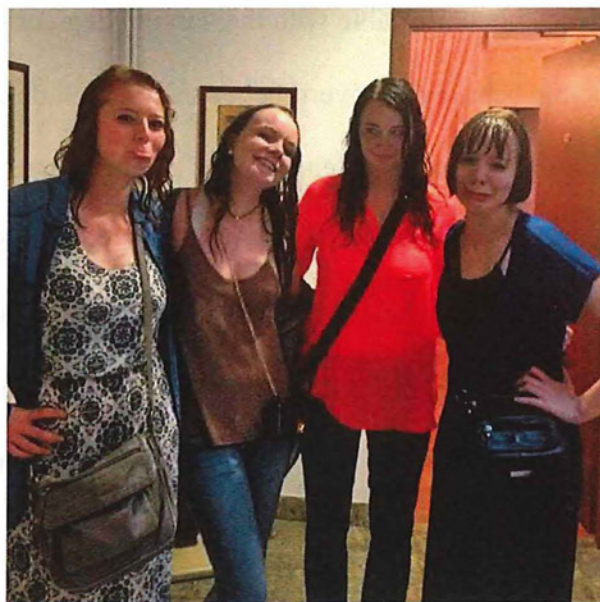
I read the book and watched the movie and I've still got nothing. Well, not nothing; I got disturbed by the story.

My first Italian play helped me grow not only as an artist with a keener eye for detail in a production as I spent far too long thinking about the color gold, but *A Clockwork Orange* laid the groundwork for me being able to handle watching more adult content in theatre. As I continued my journey as a theatre artist after Italy, I discovered how important it is to me to be able to understand the play isn't real. That sounds so simple, but I learned that being able to distinguish the fictional world from our world allows me to objectively think about the play. If audiences only focus on the aspects of the show that they found too shocking or inappropriate, then they miss the message the play was trying to convey. As I was watching *A Clockwork Orange*, thinking about why the director wanted to tell the story in this particular way to make the audience uncomfortable with the varying degrees of violence, I realized that it's the same principle behind the government's experiment on Alex. The government wants to make Alex uncomfortable with violence, so he'll stop committing crimes and attacking people, and that same message was being sent to the audience. This play, in my opinion, aimed to prompt audiences to think about the society they live in and if they don't want their world to end up like the play's world, then they need to evaluate their actions. In that moment, everything clicked, and the play made sense, even though I couldn't understand the dialogue or always keep up with the plot.

But our adventure with theatre didn't end there. We still had to find our way back to the hotel. While we were in the theater it started to rain. Then by the time we were ready to leave it was pouring. None of us had thought to bring an umbrella or some sort of jacket with a hood just in case of a torrential downpour. Everyone was wearing either maxi dresses or lightweight

tunics. Rather than wait it out, because it didn't seem like it would let up any time soon, we decided we'd just brave the storm. Our logic seems flawed, and like we were setting ourselves up for disaster, but how bad could a fifteen to twenty-minute walk be? Very bad. The roads were slippery, and we were dangerously running through the streets where cars never like to yield to pedestrians and we had to remember our Italian definitions of the stoplights. The roads were basically ankle-deep puddles. Also, I swear people were pointing and laughing at us, the four young Americans who didn't think to bring an umbrella because everyone else knows how messed up European weather is. I distinctly remember Shelby saying, "I may be wet, but I can still hear!" And as if that wasn't enough, the umbrella and rain poncho sales people kept coming up to us trying to sell umbrellas and ponchos. But by that point it was too late. We were already soaked through. What good was a poncho going to do now?

Before we left for Italy, Ms. Dalton told us that Rome had one of the best drainage systems. Does the best drainage system allow the roads to flood past ankle-deep puddles? As we were on our way back to the hotel, I decided this "best drainage system" label was complete crap. I've gone to water parks and not been this drenched. Ms. Dalton also told us that in general, when we're in Rome that if something isn't working



I present four soaking wet travelers: Shelby, Melissa, Hannah D., and me.

out according to plan, "It's not time for hysterics; it's time for gelato!" Naturally, I thought I'd lift our spirits by repeating this statement. But, no, this felt like a time for hysterics. To quote

Shelby again, “We are NOT making a gelato stop!” And I knew she meant it. We did not make a gelato stop. Instead, we walked through the rain, trying not to fixate on how pathetic we felt.

By the time we made it to the hotel, everyone else was already back from seeing the churches and making dinner plans. I marched up the stairs to our room to change out of what could now only be described as a wetsuit. I had to peel that dress off and wring it out and then hang it up to dry. About a week later it was finally dry. But my Vans were still soaked and making these awful squishy noises when I walked because they were filled with water. I decided I would use the hotel hair dryer to blow dry my shoes. And here is where we got Debbie’s SnapChat video that she sent to everyone on the trip. It was ten or eleven that night and I was still trying to dry my shoes. I heard Debbie say, “Hey what are you doing?” I walked as far as I could out of the bathroom with the world’s shortest hair dryer cord and sassed her back, with my fake-crying voice, “Blow drying my shoes!” And that’s how everyone saw my miserable self trying to blow dry her shoes in the middle of the night. I sat them by the open window hoping nature would dry them off overnight. Nope. Next morning, still wet. They eventually dried up the next day after walking outside in the sun all day.

Weather challenges aside, I was proud of the four of us for getting ourselves to and from the theater. On the way back, we ran without knowing the exact route we took to get there. Even while running without direction, we managed to retrace our steps quickly and not get lost. I was glad to have a group of friends that day, not just because misery loves company and because I didn’t want to find my way back on my own, but also to have people to share the experience with. Something that I thought our group did well while we were in Italy was making groups to explore different sites. I always felt included, and I hope everyone else did, too. I can say with the utmost confidence that I could’ve spontaneously joined any subgroup and it wouldn’t have

been weird nor would I have felt out of place. I think that speaks to the bonds our class formed over the school year and that was almost as magical as being in Italy. Looking at my three trips abroad, the Italy Squad, as we called ourselves, was the group that I felt closest to. They reminded me how important friendship is and that finding it is a gift. We had a group of a variety of majors from nearly every discipline and everyone is now connected by those two weeks abroad. I think everyone found something in Italy that they truly connected with, and I enjoyed watching my friends make those connections.

How I Became an International Thespian

The place where I felt most in my element was the ancient Roman theater at Ostia Antica. As per usual, before it was in ruins, Ostia held a different purpose than it does today. Ostia was a port city, which would've been a key part of the trade industry. In addition, it's an important site because the town has been preserved; it's a microcosm of ancient Rome. We weren't seeing ancient ruins surrounded by modern day Rome anymore. But I'll be honest, I didn't care about that as much once I heard that we were walking in the theater. I was surprised simply because I forgot that there was a theater. I like to think I was more excited to be there than the groups of elementary school field trips. I watched them in their matching T-shirts follow their teachers and thought about what it would be like to grow up in Rome and go to places like Ostia on field trips. I wondered if students in Italy, at any age, feel awestruck by these ancient ruins like tourists do, or if the sites seem normal. Did these seven-year-olds even think seeing the theater and the ruins was cool? How much can you truly appreciate a place like this at age seven? I would say that as a university student, who took a class on Rome and Florence, that I was better equipped to appreciate it than the seven-year-olds; but, then again, I forgot the theater existed. I couldn't imagine getting used to living somewhere with these incredible historic sites and not being moved by them; however, I also didn't think that I'd be standing in an ancient theater, feeling like a true thespian, either.

The theater has survived for thousands of years and we could walk in and sit on it (again with the sitting on ancient rocks). I wrote in my travel journal, "The highlight of the day was being able to go into the ancient theater. Oh my gosh walking up to the ancient bleacher seating and looking down at the space they would have had to play with made everything real. I was sitting on ancient Rome." Again, I was amazed to see that the pictures of ancient theaters from

my textbooks were real. Unlike the rest of Roman history, I didn't have a problem believing that theatre was real and being there in person reinforced every introduction to theatre lesson I'd ever



Our class sitting in the theater. Front row: Debbie, Shelby, Josh S., Hannah D., Holly, Ms. Dalton
Middle row: Jason, Kris, Caitlyn, Chris, Anna, Leah, me, Hannah F., Josh K.
Back row: Melissa, Sara

had. Sitting up in the nosebleed section gave me almost an aerial view of the space. In this panoramic view, I could see the slope of the seats and their semicircle configuration, the playing space down at the bottom with masks on display at the back of the stage (which looked much better than the ones I drew for my Theatre Arts class back in high school), and other

visitors in the playing space, demonstrating their various theatrical skills.

As we were all sitting in the theater, Ms. Dalton turned back and looked at me and said, "Julia, tell us what you know about Roman theatre." For whatever reason, Ms. Dalton caught me off guard and I couldn't believe this woman's audacity to ask the resident theatre major to share what she knew about Roman theatre. She had been asking us questions the entire trip, but this just felt so unexpected. In that moment it felt as though all of my knowledge fell out of my brain. The only facts that came to mind were all about the Greeks, which were similar, but not the same. With my commitment to accuracy and education, I didn't want to just give random facts and lead everyone astray. My inner monologue was something like, "I swear I learned stuff. I know I know stuff. Okay, here's that chance to look all impressive and dazzling. It'd be really great if you didn't screw it up." I was probably looking for anything to spark my memory, but I was also trying to keep a straight face, because I didn't want the rest of the class to see my panic.

I started talking about the acoustics of the open-air theaters in general and how the masks and space were designed to amplify the sound because obviously there were no modern microphones, nor did the ancient Romans have the slightest idea that microphones would exist. In ancient times the acting styles were also exaggerated, by our modern standards and conventions. But the actors had to be over the top, so the audience would understand what was happening in the play if they were sitting in the nosebleed section. Audiences were also more vocal, sometimes shouting at the actors to make their reaction to the play known. Since the ancient Romans weren't shushing their audiences like we do today in Western theatre, it was even more important that the actors could project their voices over all that commotion. All this talk about sound led in to the most surreal moment of the day, if not the whole trip or my whole life.

After my crash-course in theatre history, Ms. Dalton told me to run down to the bottom of the stage to see if they could hear me from the top. I said, "Oh, you'll be able to hear, trust me." I spent years doing theatre without microphones, or reliable microphones, so I'd had a lot of practice with projection in spaces not designed to help with that. I guess I was fortunate to be given a voice that carries. Getting down those stone steps was interesting, considering they weren't built with a uniform depth and there were none of those convenient railings to hold onto. I also became acutely aware that my class was probably watching me, and I didn't want to move at a snail's pace and keep them waiting. But it would've been quite embarrassing to lose my balance and fall down those stone steps. It was worth the struggle once I got down there, though.

The acoustics were almost too good to be true. I spent my time in theatre school trying to understand the science behind the sound waves bouncing back and whatnot but never fully grasped the concept. I'll admit that I was a bit skeptical as to whether a person could actually

project their voice to the back row and speak over the audience without a microphone. My skepticism went away once I heard my own voice echo and bounce back down to me. It was almost as if I could see or feel the sound waves moving, which I know seems kind of impossible. What was interesting, though, was that I couldn't hear anyone from our group yelling down to me. I could see their mouths moving, but I assumed they were speaking at regular volumes. Then I started yelling back to them, even though I could have just spoken at a regular volume. I guess that's the ingenious design of the space to stifle the noise from the audience, so the actors aren't distracted. What I finally heard was, "Do something!" "Recite something!" "Do *Hamlet*!"

And in that moment, I was reminded why, as a theatre person, it is important to always be prepared because you never know when someone's going to ask you to put on a show. Now, between you and me, the people reading my story, I always have "The Wizard and I" from *Wicked* prepared. It was the first song I sang for a formal audience where I left feeling incredibly accomplished and proud of what I did. And it's a beast of a song, so coming out of that feeling on top of the world is no small feat for any singer. So, in a normal world, I'd just sing that for them to appease my rowdy audience. But my high maintenance self, who I'll self-diagnose as suffering from some form of imposter syndrome when it comes to theatre and often questioned if she was any good at it, hadn't warmed up or practiced in a long time. As a perfectionist who also puts a lot of pressure on herself, I didn't want this impromptu performance to go poorly, or not as well as I would've liked; then I'd always associate this experience with an awkward memory. That's a lot of thinking (or rather, panicking) to happen within twenty seconds.

Then I heard, "Do *Hamilton*!" I shouted back, "You guys want me to *rap*!?" I personally think I'm a good rapper. And it should come as no surprise to anyone that my rapping experience was limited to *The Music Man*, the Witch's rap about vegetables from *Into the Woods*, and

Hamilton. I just so happened to have spent the semester listening to *Hamilton* non-stop and had a lot of it memorized. I also always got good marks from my voice teacher on my breath support and control, so I was pretty good at getting out a lot of words in a short amount of time. But, I don't think I had ever rapped *Hamilton* for an audience before. My inner monologue changed to, "Am I really going to do this? I gotta do this soon, they're probably getting impatient." No matter how much I psyched myself out, I realized that I would be mad at myself if I came all this way and didn't do something. Plus, back in ancient times women couldn't perform onstage, so this was my chance to shatter the open-air ceiling. Naturally, I channeled all that energy into a rap about 18th century America and Alexander Hamilton's influence on our financial system.

I realized later that afternoon that I picked the most American story to rap in the ancient Italian theater. Perhaps it would've been more fitting if I'd had a *commedia dell'arte* bit or an operatic scene at my disposal. But I'm sure it was epic and delighted dozens of people. I learned that I can rap in front of an audience and I became more familiar with how actors would have performed to a crowd in that type of venue. Most importantly, I had a lot of fun and got over that mild irrational fear about rapping for an



"Onstage" at Ostia, in the middle of my rap.

audience. I wrote, "I can't believe I did that. Holy crap. Talk about getting a performance rush. I can't even imagine what it would have been like to play to a full house...This was totally one of my favorite experiences and I will definitely be telling my theatre students this story."

I think this was the first connection I made between my experiences as a traveler helping me as a future educator. Not only is it a fun story that I would include as an anecdote in a lesson about Roman theatre, but the experience brought me as close as I could probably get to the origins of Western theatre. I can describe the experience of being in this ancient theater to my students in a way that a textbook can't. Then I realized that I can do that with any of my travel experiences and help my students make these worldly connections. I love teaching theatre and English because I believe that we can learn more about ourselves by experiencing someone else's story. Now it could be one of my stories about my experiences abroad that helps my students discover something new about themselves, which would be the most unexpected, and rewarding, outcome of my nineteen-year-old self's travels abroad.

Was That Waiter Flirting With Me?

On that sweet note, it's time for a story that I will not be telling my students because it involves my first encounter with white wine. It was the evening of May 18, 2016, when most of our class decided to have dinner in the Jewish Quarter, simply because we heard that the food there was especially good, and since we were already under the impression that all food in Rome was good, we definitely needed to check it out. Lots of this story didn't make it into my travel journal because I knew that I wasn't going to be the only one reading it. Due to the stigma surrounding the consumption of alcohol that had been ingrained in my nineteen-year-old self's head, which I assumed everyone in America shared, I decided that I shouldn't put the story in my journal. That being said, believe me when I say I remember that night so vividly that it didn't need to be recorded. But now, years later, I'm declaring the statute of limitations lifted, so the story can be released to the public, like in a celebrity gossip magazine.

I'll take you through the story plot point by plot point. The exposition: our group of at least ten people successfully got to the restaurant without an adult leading the way. We came to find that pronouncing the words on the Italian menu was a little challenging. I thought that I'd avoid the ridicule everyone else received after they mispronounced the words by simply pointing to the words on the menu. The inciting incident occurred as our waiter pretended not to understand what I meant, which made the miscommunication between us even more awkward than the people who ordered before me. I didn't quite understand why this was happening because he even spoke English. My friends sitting around me understood that the miscommunication wasn't because I couldn't pronounce any Italian words; the miscommunication was that I didn't realize that the waiter was flirting with me.

Throughout the rising action, my friends made fun of me. It didn't help my case that I have one of those faces that tells people I'm easy to mess with, and everyone around me picked up on that. They moved away from making fun of my Italian pronunciation to laughing at the fact that I didn't understand he was flirting with me the whole time. I was probably ten minutes into this dinner when I knew it was going to be a long night. And this time there were no signs of the dinner turning into another *coup de moulin* scenario. This waiter clearly liked us, or at least me, a lot more than the one we had in France two years before this did. My friends kept laughing at me and just couldn't seem to let this go. No, I was not going to get his number. Apparently, I got so annoyed with this that it brought me to the crisis of the story in that it drove me to drinking, and I ordered my first ever glass of white wine. The climactic moment of this story: I drank the entire glass of wine.

Prior to this night at the Jewish Quarter, I still hadn't finished a glass of wine by myself. I discovered that I like white wine much more than red wine. Though I jokingly say I was driven to drinking to cope with my friends making fun of me, I was still responsible. I made sure to also eat my feelings in pasta and drink water in between to balance out my alcohol. But I didn't have a problem finishing this glass of wine on my own because it was delicious. The first alcoholic beverage I actually finished, and I didn't even know what kind of white wine it was. It might sound lame that I considered this an accomplishment, but I hadn't had that many opportunities prior to Italy where I could finish alcoholic beverages, as I've already mentioned, so I was still slowly learning how to navigate this aspect of adulthood. I felt like a sophisticated adult and this was the most alcohol I'd ever had in one sitting.

This brings me to the falling action, our walk back to the hotel. I laughed an awful lot, a lot, a lot. Either I was just having a great time laughing about old *Friends* episodes, which I've

been known to do on multiple occasions while sober, or I was a little buzzed because I wasn't used to consuming alcohol. As I looked down at the streets we were walking on, I questioned myself, "Am I drunk? Is this a straight line I'm walking in? Do I know where I'm going? Like I could figure this out when I'm sober, so that doesn't count. No, idiot, if you can be asking these questions, you're probably fine." I was determined to convince myself that I still had my wits about me. I'd seen my friends finish one glass of wine and they didn't seem drunk, so I figured that I probably wasn't, either. I was more concerned with the current effects the alcohol had on me than if I would be facing the consequences in the morning. In all the movies I'd seen, the characters had to drink a lot more than I did to be stumbling out of the bar, waking up with a hangover, and not remember the previous night, so I hoped that I would be fine. I didn't want to be the kid to stumble into breakfast the next morning wearing her sunglasses, shushing everyone because she couldn't handle her alcohol from the night before. I would've felt so humiliated that I might've made everyone swear never to speak of it again.

Can you all see why I didn't want to have that incriminating evidence written in my travel journal? I also may have been kind of embarrassed at the possibility that I was slightly affected by alcohol, even though that's what happens when you consume it. Maybe I had it in my head that drinking responsibly meant that you didn't get to the point where alcohol affected you. So, I might have let myself think that I was irresponsible because everyone else that night seemed to be doing just fine, or if they were in any way affected by their alcohol they hid it so much better. Again, I was naive and inexperienced, so I probably wouldn't have noticed anyway. But the resolution of my white wine story is simply that I woke up the next morning feeling the same as any other morning. I was quite proud of myself for "beating the hangover,"

as I called it. I felt like I was a successful adult because I'd learned how to drink responsibly and carry on with my life as usual afterward.

But at breakfast someone had the brilliant thought of telling Ms. Dalton about this "new game we started playing where we hand Julia our drinks to see what face she'll make." I eavesdropped on that comment and whipped my head around to see how potentially irresponsible I looked. I'd tried sips of other liquors while in Rome, just so I could say I tried them. But those experiences were hardly noteworthy since I didn't like what I tried. The most notable experience was when I tried limoncello. I drafted a portion of a limerick that night about limoncello, and it's probably my finest work of poetry.

"Smells like lemon Clorox wipes

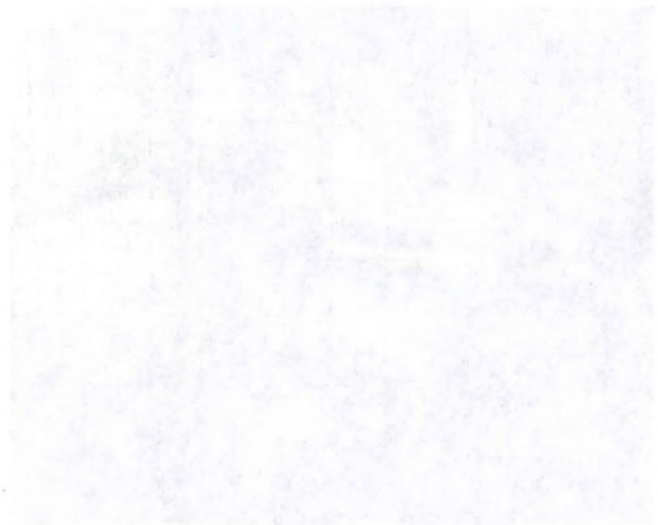
Looks like lemonade

Tastes like an angry lemon drop"

Anyway, in the process of telling Ms. Dalton all about my experimenting with alcohol by trying everyone's drinks, someone said, "Oh, but she had her own drink last night and she finished that off." My natural reflex was to blurt out, "That was the most alcohol I'd had in one sitting. Oh, crap that sounded bad. I don't play with alcohol." After a lot of backpedaling and rushed explanations of various stories, I think I finally caught everyone at breakfast up to speed as to where I was in my relationship with alcohol. Just in time for someone else to bring up everyone's new favorite story about the waiter from the Jewish Quarter.

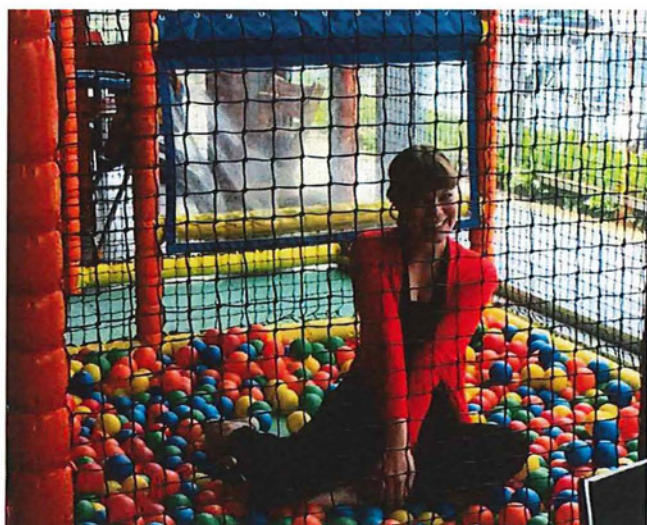
What a way to end our time in Rome. I learned a lot about myself over those ten days and found many reasons to laugh at myself. I felt validated in my decision to follow Ms. Dalton's footsteps and then to metaphorically follow her lead by trusting myself as an independent traveler. Even though I was navigationally challenged, I could get myself from point A to point

B with some friends and a map. I could also play an active role in my learning by thinking about the places we saw and then by writing my reflections in my travel journal. I learned about how people used spaces thousands of years ago and what those places mean to us now while reconciling some childhood confusions about what aspects of ancient Rome were real. I thought critically about the arts and how they affect me. My travels brought me a new confidence in myself as a young adult and as a future teacher. I also got to experience a new part of adulthood by gaining the foundation of an alcohol education. That was a lot to cram into ten days, but I was ready to do it all again over the next four days in Florence.



Florence Y'all

I'd like to preface my time in Florence by saying that I have been to Florence, Kentucky at least a hundred times in my life, but this was my first visit to Florence, Italy. I must say, it kicked Florence, Kentucky's ass. The bus ride was more exciting than any car ride I've had to Kentucky, and the gas station we stopped at had a ball pit. The term "ball pit" is a little misleading, because it was basically a square of floor with maybe thirty to fifty of those plastic balls, probably riddled with germs. Even toddlers would've realized how lame this attempt at a ball pit was. At least I respected the rules of this gas station's ball pit and asked for adult permission before going in. I believe Dr. Jason Powell's exact words to me were, "I would love to see you *try* to get in there." And of course, I took that as a challenge and thought, "I'll show you." So, I took off my shoes and ran over there because I needed to prove myself.



Here, we can see a nineteen-year-old in her natural environment.

Sara seemed to think that Ms. Dalton, who was not a witness to this event, would be disappointed in us if we played in the ball pit, so she kept watch. That didn't concern me, though, and I wasn't going to let anyone stop me from having fun. When was I going to get the chance to play in a Florentine gas station ball pit? Sara asked Ms. Dalton when we got back on the bus if she would've been

disappointed if, say, one of us were to have played in the ball pit? To which she said, "No..."

And I quickly called out, "Good, 'cuz I did!"

It's hard to top a sub-par ball pit in a gas station, but once we got into the city, Florence did not disappoint. One of the first things we saw in our four days in Florence was the Duomo at Santa Maria del Fiore. The cathedral itself was completed nearly 600 years before we visited and one of the things it's famous for is the dome created by Filippo Brunelleschi, about whom we had to read an entire book about, *Brunelleschi's Dome* by Ross King. The Duomo is significant, architecturally speaking, because during the brainstorming sessions about how to build this dome, Brunelleschi had to figure out how to build a dome that could support its weight without flying buttresses, because apparently those were out of style. Obviously, he figured it out since we went inside and climbed the stairs up to the catwalk. It felt like I could almost touch the paint even though we were still incredibly far from the top. I'd forgotten that the inside was covered in frescos. Even though the inside was beautiful, I was more excited to climb to the top of the dome outside. Going up those narrow steps, all 463 of them, it was getting to the point where I couldn't remember a time in my



life when I wasn't climbing stairs.

Debbie, Leah, Anna, me, Caitlyn, and Josh K. survived the climb to the top of the Duomo!

All I had to say about that in my journal was, "Damn, my legs hurt."

But once we got up there, it looked like one of those aerial postcards. Instead of looking down at the people inside the cathedral, we looked at the city from the top of the world. It was the roof of the church, but standing more than 300 feet above the ground may as well have been the top of the world. Going down those stairs made us so dizzy, so we could have believed we

descended from the top of the world to get back to the street level. I wrote in my travel journal, "I realize that this dome wasn't designed for tour groups, but there has got to be a better way to move people through there." It was probably a different experience 600 years ago if someone were to take those stairs to do maintenance on the building, or if they just wanted to look at the view, because at least they could walk the narrow, spiral stairs without 100 other people in close proximity to them. And since Florence probably isn't going to let someone put an elevator in the cathedral, we were stuck with the stairs. But walking up and down the steps, crammed next to people, did bring me this insightful observation about Florence, "After that our legs were shaking- every day is leg day here."

Needless to say, we did not have the strength to walk up the Campanile after. The Campanile is a bell tower, designed by Giotto, conveniently located right next door to Santa Maria del Fiore. Even though they were geographically close, if we'd climbed the Campanile it would have been another 400-something steps with each ring of the bells echoing the pain. Some of our classmates have Olympic-level stamina and did walk to the top of the Campanile, but I was not strong enough for that. This day taught me not to take for granted the free water fountains on every street in Rome, because I desperately needed some water after that climb. Water fountains, even the rusty pipe versions, were scarce in Florence, for whatever reason. I guess the Florentines don't need to stay as hydrated, even after walking up one thousand steps.

From our first few hours in Florence, we could already see differences between the two cities beyond the free water. In Rome, not only can you get free water everywhere, but you can get into any of the churches for free; in Florence it was only Santa Maria del Fiore that was free. It made sense that Florence would be more commercial since they have a history of being obsessed with trade. I didn't expect Florence to feel so modern, though. I'd gotten used to

walking through Rome and being surrounded by ancient ruins among the modern elements, but in Florence we didn't see many any ruins, just many old buildings. Florence also felt more compact than Rome, with the Duomo as our central location, acting almost as a roundabout where each direction took us somewhere different. We had more opportunities to go exploring because the city was smaller, which I liked because it felt like we could still experience a lot in Florence even though we only had four days.

Some of the best memories I have of this trip are of the spontaneous things we did. That means a lot because I have always been the type of person who likes to plan everything out and know exactly when and where I'm going and who with. One of my favorite spontaneous adventures in Florence was the opera. We were going to see Verdi's *La Traviata* in the country I consider the pinnacle of opera. I had always wanted to see an opera, and where better to go than in Italy? As with *A Clockwork Orange*, I didn't know anything about the story. I learned that *La Traviata* is what *Moulin Rouge* is based on, but I hadn't seen *Moulin Rouge*. Thank goodness for the saving grace that is *Wikipedia*. This time I was smart enough to go know it would not be in English, so I needed to have some sort of background before watching the performance. If all else failed, I told myself I'd stop trying to piece together a plot and just enjoy the music.

I figured out that *La Traviata* translates to *The Fallen Woman* and it's about this courtesan Violetta who falls in love with a man, Alfredo, who has been in love with her for a long time. But their relationship faces the same struggles as any romantic relationship: Alfredo's father wants them to break up because of Violetta's scandalous reputation and Violetta is suffering from tuberculosis. After overcoming the outside forces trying to keep them apart, Alfredo shows up as Violetta is on her deathbed. She hits one last high note and then dies. The End.

I expected to see an old timey Italian opera house (my younger self was just determined to feel like she'd walked into *The Phantom of the Opera*, so however that happened was fine with me). But the theater was nowhere near that. I anticipated seeing a grand opera house and got the equivalent of a middle school auditorium without any sort of orchestra pit. The "curtain" was basically a glorified projector screen and it moved at about that exact speed. Just imagine sitting in a lecture hall waiting for the professor to lower or raise the screen so we can move on to the next lesson. That was the opera. They weren't the smoothest transitions I'd ever seen, but they may have been the roughest.

The awkward curtain and the awkward blocking got in the way of the performance for me and I kept thinking it all felt unnatural. As we were watching the performance, the extra production elements felt superfluous and I thought that it would've been more effective if the performers had just performed at music stands without any sort of blocking, costuming, set, etc. The singers and the musicians were so talented, and I found it almost frustrating that they had to put up with the awkward execution of this production. It just didn't align with what I envision when I think of the opera. I realize I just said I hadn't seen an opera before, and I probably figured it would be just like watching a musical that's sung-through, without dialogue, just in Italian and with more elaborate costumes. That wasn't the worst assumption, but the production just didn't do a lot for me.

I had many notes, rather critiques, that we went through on the walk back to the hotel. Something tells me if Violetta were actually suffering from tuberculosis, she would not be hitting those notes. I know that theatre requires audience members to suspend their disbelief, but I couldn't get past the fact that she would've been coughing up blood instead. If I directed this opera, I would have had Violetta hack up a little blood for authenticity purposes. I also kept

getting distracted by the fact that Alfredo was much older and shorter than Violetta, and for whatever reason it threw me for a loop. And who thought that they'd be able to dance in such a tiny space? After going on and on complaining to my friends and writing the outline of a scathing review in my travel journal, I remembered that I could say I've been to an opera in Italy and that was all I needed.

If I learned nothing else from the opera, other than the fact that I'm quite opinionated when it comes to the performing arts, I learned could be a real adult and organize a group activity. Melissa made the concept of coordinating a group of us to go somewhere look much easier than I thought it was. Granted, our group for *A Clockwork Orange* was only four people and that night at the opera we had closer to twelve people, which made up about 90 percent of the audience. Why I didn't anticipate that planning something spur of the moment and coordinating all the people and clearly communicating with everyone all at once would be a lot of work I don't know. What mattered more than the performance was that this was one of my first experiences having other people follow my footsteps, in a way. I didn't anticipate that happening on this trip because I had convinced myself that I was incapable of handling that responsibility. I also thought I simply didn't want to take on the responsibility of having to literally lead people somewhere or to metaphorically bring them to a new experience. But I proved to myself in Florence that I could do it and I exceeded my own expectations. I didn't realize that was happening at the time, but as I look back I finally recognize how important this experience was to my growth as an independent traveler and adult.

Why Do I Like This Painting?

My time in Florence may have been one of the rare times in history when the performing arts had less of an effect on me than the visual arts did, which I certainly didn't see coming. Somehow, I've made it this far without going into details about the magnificent art we saw throughout Italy. I'm pretty sure some people would consider that a crime against the humanities, especially since I didn't even mention that we saw the Sistine Chapel and how I wished I could be there without all the tourists, so I could lie on the floor to look up at Michelangelo's frescos. In general, I think my museum experiences would have been better had there not been the constant interruptions of a guard going, "*Silencio*. Silence. No photo. No video," which killed the ambience of it all.

But there we were, at the heart of the Renaissance, and I managed to live it up in these art museums. In Florence, we went to the Uffizi Gallery, which is a prominent art museum that houses nearly every piece of Renaissance art I had to study during freshman year. I also found it impressive that these artworks have survived given Florence's tendency to flood. We had about three hours or so to go explore the museum. That's a long time for someone who isn't nuts about paintings and sculptures. Yet I was determined to enjoy myself and make the most of the incredible art displayed in this museum, which I did appreciate even if I wasn't hardcore fangirling over it. Some might call what I ended up doing in the museum "goofing off," but I like to call it "creativity" or "having an entertaining time."

Leah and I were good at navigating museums; we were like the museum dream team. We could pretty much always find what we wanted to see, see it, admire it, and then swiftly move to the next thing. The adults told us we probably couldn't see a whole museum in three hours; well, we showed them. At the Uffizi, we ran (not literally, we walked because we have a great respect

for art and didn't want to accidentally ruin something) around finding similarities among works of art. That sounds quite academic, does it not? This is how I described what I did in the museum in my travel journal,

Today I also thought it would be fun to create the *Mona Lisa* family tree with the portraits we saw. I'm pretty proud of it. We have immediate family, a crazy uncle, long lost relatives, [her brother that was many years older than she and had already moved out when she was young to become a priest, so they never had a close relationship], you name it. I will say, for someone who's not super jazzed about visual art, I know how to have fun in museums.

I took pictures of all the portraits I found in the Uffizi and posted them to our Facebook group with the captions of who they were in relation to Mona Lisa. There was even one that looked just like Sara who we captioned, "the second cousin who hides in the bathroom at family gatherings." Twenty Facebook notifications. All from Ms. Dalton. She liked and commented on almost all of them and said that I was creative. I chalked that up as a major victory—A+, gold stars, all of the above. That's what I got from her responses. What a successful and enriching day at the museum. And to think I thought she'd think I just spent the afternoon goofing off in the museums. Nope. I'm creative, instead.

The academic in me feels as though she needs to convince you all that I did in fact do some learning while I was in this museum. But in order for this next story to make sense, we need to do a bit of a flashback.

In the spring, it was March 2016, specifically, Ms. Dalton gave our class an assignment to research an Italian artist and one of their works that we could see in Rome or Florence. But there was a catch that you couldn't use any of the artists who doubled as ninja turtles.

Unfortunately, those were basically all the artists I knew at the time. And there was an additional list of artists I couldn't use, so my knowledge was pretty much depleted. Somehow, I dropped the ball on this research assignment and on the assignment for our humanities class, both of which were conveniently due on a Thursday. I realized this on Wednesday night. I hadn't even picked my artist.

So, I had to write both of these assignments that night and I was up until about four that morning, I think. Thank goodness class didn't start until two. I was grateful then, and I'm still grateful now. While I'm showing my gratitude, I'd also like to thank Cole Porter for mentioning Botticelli in the song "You're the Top" from *Anything Goes*. My thespian self decided to listen to a Sutton Foster marathon as she wrote these papers and came across *Anything Goes*. In that moment I was also thankful that my teacher Mr. Owen mentioned Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* in AP European History class in high school because that was the one painting I knew, so I picked it for my assignment. When I say that I knew this painting, I mean I remembered the title and what it looked like.



Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, which I photographed in the Uffizi months after the research paper crisis.

The whole research and writing process were just a mess. Not even a hot mess, a frazzled mess. We had to write about why we liked this particular work of art and why we wanted to see it in Italy. That apparently was a tricky question for me at midnight. I had no clue why I liked the painting, but I truly did like it. So, I asked my roommate Nikki, "Nikki! Why do I like this

painting?! Because I have to like one and I picked the one I knew! But I can't write that down!"

Nikki was probably busy with her own assignments, and didn't have time to deal with my questions, and she said, "I feel like you should know why you like the painting." And since it was probably midnight, I sassed back with, "Yeah well I don't, and I just need to write something so just give me anything." She responded, "Well...I mean the colors are nice." And the lightbulb went off in my head, "The colors! Great!"

I ran with that and started writing down what I thought was absolute crap about why these colors spoke to me. And I wrote those two papers in under 24 hours. True story, in the process of "proofreading" my work, I noticed that I listed the date as March 31, 1996. But the year 1996 didn't seem correct to me because we didn't have laptops back then. So, I had to check the corner of my screen to see the actual date and time to remember that it was 2016, not 1996. I also wasn't alive back then. You would think that the fact that I wasn't born until 1997 would've tipped me off that it wasn't 1996, but nope. I wrote to Ms. Dalton in my travel journal explaining this:

So, if you thought those papers were bad, it's because they were written during the early hours of the morning when I was tired and couldn't remember what year it was. If you thought those were good, you should see what I can do after the proper amount of sleep. Then you told us how much you love Botticelli the next day in class and my mind just went, 'Well, shit. I feel as though I've done an even worse thing by turning in my paper that felt sub par.' All of this came together today at the Uffizi.

Seeing the painting up close was the exact opposite experience I had when seeing the *Mona Lisa*. *Birth of Venus* was so much bigger than I anticipated. I remembered Ms. Dalton

telling us that Botticelli has his own room in the Uffizi and she wants to live in it. I also remember her telling us on multiple occasions how she likes the texture of paintings and wants to touch them. Needless to say, every time one of those alarms went off in the museum I just assumed it was her. That protective glass got in the way of touching *Birth of Venus* and it was also distracting when looking at those colors I said I liked so much.

The images online certainly did not do this painting justice. There was so much that I didn't notice until I was standing right in front of it. For example, I never noticed that the figure on the left is blowing the wind that carries the flowers. Maybe it's because I was standing so close to a massive painting, but I felt as though I could walk onto that beach. I threw all of these fascinating insights into my travel journal, along with this story so Ms. Dalton could understand how I felt during my time in the Botticelli room.

About a month after we got back to the U.S. I finally looked at my grade on that paper, and she loved it. So, I guess the lesson was that you should do your whole research paper in one night? But I did like the painting so much and I find this story inspirational (is that conceited to find your own story inspirational?) that I got a poster of *Birth of Venus* which I hung above my desk during sophomore year to remind myself that if I can make it through writing those two papers in one night, I can handle anything.

A Typical Day in Florence: Misadventures in Public Transportation and a Free Shot

Gaining my independence in Florence happened quicker than it did in Rome because not only did we have less time in Florence to get our bearings, but I had less time to be afraid that I couldn't navigate the city. As a class, we followed the same process of simply walking everywhere, usually following Ms. Dalton, to figure out how to find various sites. Whoever said that exploring a city on foot is the best way to become acquainted with it was on to something. Hundreds of years ago, that's how people would have gotten around the city. By walking, as opposed to driving, for example, we gained a more authentic perspective. The city was originally designed to be experienced on foot. Even though the city itself is modernized, we were still walking places where politicians and artists and many others walked centuries ago. While history remembers them from their contributions, they were once people in our metaphorical shoes, just strolling through the streets of Florence, living their typical lives. I would hardly call my time in Florence as part of my typical life, but I knew venturing into the world to experience things that we don't usually experience would help me grow in my life.

I also found that sometimes doing something that seems typical or mundane can have a greater impact when you're away from home. I think my stay in Florence was the first time I went out for the purpose of watching the sunset. I'd seen sunsets before, but I'd never gone somewhere with the sole intention of watching it. One night in Florence, a group of friends asked if I wanted to go with them to the Ponte Vecchio to watch the sunset. The Ponte Vecchio is a famous, medieval bridge over the Arno River that just happens to be a perfect spot to view a picturesque sunset. I'm convinced that everything in Italy looks like a movie or a postcard. Florentine sunsets beat out Indiana sunsets every time, especially when you can view them from a famous bridge. I'm not that into anything having to do with nature or the outdoors, and

honestly didn't care about the sunset, but Debbie convinced me to go. I figured that I've already seen sunsets, would this one be that different?

Yes. Not only was this the first sunset to actually capture my attention, but this was one of our first adventures navigating Florence without a grown-up. At this point it became less of a surprise to me that we were able to make it there and back without someone older leading the way. We got our bearings quickly by walking



Sara, Debbie, Caitlyn, Chris, Josh K., and me standing on the Ponte Vecchio at sunset.

to the Ponte Vecchio and we established landmarks to guide us in the future. I'd also surpassed my previous record for the longest stay in Europe and was starting to feel like being abroad with this group of classmates was my new normal.

Since we were so successful at navigating museums, Leah and I teamed up in Florence to walk the city and figured out how to navigate it in an afternoon. Well she probably did. I have no clue if or when I figured it out. Before we left, Ms. Dalton told us that if we got lost in Florence we should just run towards the Duomo. Sounds simple enough. What we didn't realize was that it was so huge it mattered which side of the Duomo you were on. Leah said to me, "Don't worry, as long as we can find the Irish pub I know where we are." To which I said, "Leah, why is your landmark the tiny hole-in-the-wall Irish pub and not the huge-ass dome?" Because it mattered which side of the dome you were on, Julia. I didn't feel like I knew where we were in relation to the hotel until we found the Disney store, conveniently located next door to the hotel. But as long as I had a friend it didn't matter to me what way we took. I learned to trust in our skills and instincts that we'd figure it out. Finding my way through Italy with my friends showed me that

there isn't one correct way to travel. As with life, there is not one definitive, right answer. That realization was both reassuring and a little unnerving because we wouldn't have the luxury of just memorizing one formula for how to travel and follow it to a tee, but we could forge our own path that could be just as good as someone else's. Traveling reiterated to me that it's fine for people to take different paths to get to the same place and that sometimes I have to stray from the norm if I want to grow.

All of that being said, traveling with Debbie to Fiesole was the ultimate measure of our independence, our intelligence, and our travel savviness. Fiesole is an ancient town in Florence that has survived for thousands of years. And in case we were longing for some more Italian ruins, Fiesole had plenty. I thought of it as the Florence equivalent of Ostia, in a way, because there was also a theater and postcard-worthy views. On our last full day in Florence, May 23, 2016, I traveled with Debbie, Holly, and the Powells to Fiesole. We took a real bus to get there. I trusted myself on foot to get places, but when it comes to navigating public transportation (or my own when I'm the driver), especially when going somewhere new, I was a little on the apprehensive side. I don't know if it's all bus systems or just those in Italy, but they were so confusing.

To add to our confusion, we decided to listen to Jason when he said to get off the bus two stops early because he thought that was the right stop. No, it actually meant that we would've had to walk up a steep hill that a bus could climb within a couple of minutes. Then we had to wait on the side of the road for the next bus. While we were waiting, Holly found a random knife sitting on this rock ledge. I don't think any of us had had something like that happen before. So, she just tossed it into the grass behind the rocks. Holly may or may not have compromised a potential crime scene. We didn't have time to do legit forensics on this knife or search for

remnants of anything, but in my experience, people aren't just accidentally forgetting their knives on the side of the road. At least she covered her hand with her sleeve to reduce fingerprints. Then before this crime scene got out of control and blown out of proportion, the bus showed up and we fled. How's that for some independence? We listened to the grown-up and then were stuck on the side of the road and potentially tampered with a crime scene.

We did eventually make it to Fiesole and I made a beeline for the ancient theater. It was next to gorgeous flowers and courtyards that made me feel like Snow White surrounded by all that nature. Having learned from my previous experience, the first thing I did was run down to the bottom to see if the audience could hear me; I didn't wait to be asked. This space was much



Fiesole's small theater.

smaller than Ostia but was built in a similar architectural style that allowed for effective acoustics. Needless to say, my smaller audience could definitely hear me when I ran down to the stage. Since the records of ancient Italian drama, whether Roman or Florentine, are scarce, I wasn't able to memorize a

monologue from one of those classic plays to

perform in this space. So, I just brought back the crowd favorite and sang some *Hamilton*.

As I look back on this visit to Fiesole and tell friends about it, these are the two stories I tell. While we did more than just take a bus to Fiesole and see the ancient theater, these memories are stronger. This was the last true stop we made in Italy to see the sites and the journey happened to be more memorable than the destination. I think we all learned that

sometimes even grown-ups make mistakes while traveling and it's not the end of the world if you have to wait for the next bus, so long as you don't get busted for messing with a crime scene.

On our way back into Florence to meet up with the rest of the class, I was already getting nostalgic for Italy. As I was trying to reflect on my experiences before we'd even left, I was thinking about how when you're a kid you have to ask permission to do practically everything, and when you're an adult you have more freedom to make your own choices. Maybe the reason I found it difficult to see myself as a real adult was because I kept looking for someone with more power than I to say that I could do the thing I wanted to do and was inevitably going to do. But it's not as though I can flip a switch and suddenly not look for approval or permission and feel wholly independent. I guess that extra approval, or potential lack of approval, fueled my behavior as a new young adult.

For example, let's look at my experiences with alcohol in Florence. I recorded pretty much every drink I tried in my journal because I'm such an avid note taker. As I wrote those journals I could just feel my parents' approval seeping through the page. Yeah right. One night we were having dinner at this pizzeria and I had just adjusted to the taste of red wine. With each sip I kept thinking how they wouldn't like what I was doing, even though I wasn't breaking any rules in Italy by doing so. There's that goody two shoes of my childhood self hanging on. My nineteen-year-old self was concerned that my readers, all two of us, knew that I was being responsible with alcohol and was not doing anything wild or inappropriate.

Well, that night after dinner, our waiter brought out six shot glasses and a mysterious brown bottle of something. It wasn't a transparent bottle; it was a cold brown bottle that oddly resembled a container of hydrogen peroxide. But when we poured it out, the liquid had the consistency of syrup, but looked like a liquid once it settled in the glass. No one knew what we

had just poured in our shot glasses, but we all took the shots of this mysterious liquid. All we knew about it from the label was that it was 35 percent alcohol, the strongest I'd encountered. Because I was smart, I had my friends pour me half a shot since I was still inexperienced when it came to alcohol but also wanted to participate because I had only a few hours of legality left.

We all clinked our glasses, like they do in the movies when the friend group gets another round of shots. We took the shots, slamming the shot glasses back on to the table for emphasis. It kind of tasted like cinnamon toothpaste and everyone was feeling the sting. I was fine and told them that I felt nothing. It was probably because I had half as much as they did, but everyone stared at me in disbelief and laughed. I think they thought I was joking. Either way, I felt like I could finally hold my own as an adult drinker. Was this some sort of implicit peer pressure they warned us about in school? If it was, it kicked in a few years late. Look at me, fitting in with the cool kids after my first shot. To be fair, I fit in with them before the free shots, but it's the principle of it.

As my older self reflected on those particular experiences, I realized that I didn't do anything wrong. I can also tell myself that at least I didn't write a drunk journal. I just explored multiple facets of being an adult. In terms of drinking, I was also learning about the consequences and that it was up to me to decide if the experience of drinking alcohol would be worth it after facing those consequences. Now that I'm older, I wish I would have been able to prioritize my own approval for anything I did abroad, alcohol-related or not. I know now that I didn't have to prove anything to anyone, and it only mattered what I thought of my actions, but my nineteen-year-old self hadn't realized that. Separating me from other adults, like my parents, forced me to learn how to be my own person without worrying about what other people would say or think, if I wanted to do it, no one could stop me. I did not master that lesson during my

time in Italy or during my next trip abroad; I'm still working on it. Traveling abroad brought me many new answers to questions I didn't know I had, and it also brought me even more big questions, the most significant being: Had I reached the point in my life where I was ready to make choices for myself, by myself?

My Eyes Were Crusted Shut

The first entry in my travel journal on May 24, 2016, the day we flew back to the U.S. reads, "While I knew leaving Italy wasn't going to be an easy task, I didn't think I would get sick in the process." I anticipated that I would be sad to leave Italy, which was a fair assumption considering I cried a lot the night before about how I didn't want to go home. I also cried a lot the last time I left Europe, so I was prepared to undergo the tearful goodbyes. I never get sick, though. The last time I had to miss school because I was sick was in the fifth grade. The morning I went to Fiesole I woke up with what I assumed were allergies, which had gotten worse overnight and kept me up for most of the night.

At approximately 4:45 a.m. the morning we left Florence, I woke up with allergies messing with my nose, throat, and ears. My eyes were also crusted shut, which I'd only experienced the one time I had pink eye. Naturally, I panicked. Since I never get sick, I freak out when something like this happens. I also feel emotionally bad when I get sick, like I wasn't strong enough to make a preemptive strike against the germs. I know that doesn't make logical sense, but I pride myself on my strong immune system. And for all I knew, other people could catch this eye condition, and I didn't want to be responsible for that. To add onto that, "I was hot, breathing was interesting, and swallowing really hurt. My hair also felt sick (maybe it just needed to be washed?) and I didn't bother fixing it, that's how bad it was."

In the midst of my panic, I woke up everyone in our room, warned them not to touch anything because of potential Italian pink eye germs, and left a travel pack of Lysol wipes on the sink. My eyes were definitely pink and scary looking. Yet another test of my young adulthood: having to figure out what to do when I'm sick, potentially contagious, and find any medical situation downright frightening. Having this happen an hour before going to the airport was also

quite convenient and the highlight of the morning. I'm sure that's exactly what Ms. Dalton thought when I showed up at her door at five in the morning with tear-filled eyes because I didn't know what to do and we were leaving in forty-five minutes. My inner monologue was rapidly jumping to conclusions because:

"Isn't it a thing that if you were sick they wouldn't let you on an international flight at risk of infecting other nations? What if they had to keep me here for quarantine and I was left behind? I don't know Italian and I have no clue where I am or how to get anywhere? And it's way too early in the morning to call my parents, so now what?"

But on the outside, I was just sweating. My hair was a mess. I had no makeup on. My eyes were red and goopy. I felt so weak and pathetic. Ms. Dalton told me that I would probably live. Spoiler alert: I did. But for all I knew, I was putting my life in her hands. Better hers than mine I guess; I felt small and like I needed a grown-up with more success at traveling and not catching mysterious illnesses than me. I was freaking out so much I didn't even have time to think about how I'd be embarrassed to show up at my teacher's door at five in the morning, crying because my eyes didn't work. Any hope of looking dazzling or impressive was gone. But I bounced back, and we laugh about this story now. I also tell this story to other students to reassure them that whatever mildly embarrassing thing happened to them in class was not as pathetic as my broken eyes story, so my pink and goopy eyes have been a growing experience for numerous people.

Ever the optimist, I wrote in my journal that, "I guess I won't be crying as much about leaving now." You got that right, I cried because I hurt so much. We had a flight from Florence to Paris (my second time in Paris!), from Paris to Minneapolis, and from Minneapolis to Indianapolis. With every flight, and the varying altitudes and pressures, my head and face felt

like they were going to explode. Nothing I did could alleviate the pain. I had never felt like this before and I just sat there and cried. It's times like that that I felt bad for Caitlyn who had to sit next to me on each of those flights, especially because there was an actual baby crying on the longest flight. This was probably one of those times where they should've given me some wine with the hopes of dulling the pain or at least putting me to sleep. My sass only increased with the pain.

On the bright side, at least I wasn't blow-drying my shoes anymore.

When I got home, I had all the nonsense that was going on in my face looked at. Turns out, it was a sinus infection and my reddened eyes were not actually a symptom of pink eye. That was my first sinus infection, so how could I have known in Italy that's what was wrong with me? Of course, we didn't have any pre-med majors with us on the trip. When I told the nurse I'd been on three flights the day before, two of them international, I could tell it was actually bad because she immediately prescribed me some steroids. Then within a few days I was back to normal and could reminisce on all the high points of Italy.

I Did Become Audrey Hepburn

Throughout the trip, Ms. Dalton kept saying how proud she was of us for going out on our own in small groups to do explore parts of the cities that weren't on our group itinerary. At the time I didn't quite understand why she was so proud and I kept thinking, "You mean for going out and doing fun things? Okay. Whatever you say..."

But now I realize that she was proud of us for taking the initiative to be independent and go out on our own without a chaperone showing us the way. I was thinking also at the time that if we had been at home, we'd be doing the same thing, going out and having fun. What made it that different by doing it in Italy? Everything. The fact that we were thousands of miles away from home, in a country where we didn't know the language, changed the game. In a way, we were taking risks and willing to make mistakes by figuring out how to lead ourselves. We were brave, even if it didn't feel that way at times. We always had a friend to brave those experiences with, and I grew closer to my friends throughout our excursions in Italy. I wrote in my travel journal before we left for home,

I can't imagine how I'll adjust to southeast Indiana after this. I adjusted to Italy quicker than Muncie for my first semester of college. I'm going to miss everyone so much. We started as strangers, became friends, and left as a family. I can't remember a time when I wasn't on this trip. I've known from the start that this would not be an easy goodbye.

Thinking back to the middle of the trip, when we visited the Trevi Fountain, I didn't need to throw a Euro in the fountain to know that I would be coming back, at least to Europe, if not Rome specifically. And I could come back to Europe as a somewhat experienced international traveler with a better chance of holding her own. I just had no idea when or where that would

happen. But what mattered was that I believed I could make another trip happen if I wanted to, and I didn't need to wait around for someone else to present me with the opportunity. Wasn't that supposed to be the greatest part of being a college student: not being tied down anywhere and instead being free to travel where you want?

Since my first trip, I knew not to take any part of visiting Europe for granted. And I'm so proud of myself for knowing that. You don't ever know if you'll get the chance to come back. I wrote so much more in my journal this time, partially because it was part of my assignment, and also because I knew how fast time would go by and I wanted to save as many memories as possible. I also knew how to write better and what to



My selfie from the Duomo.

include, what would mean the most to me looking back, even if I wasn't writing this memoir. I turned in 107 pages of travel journal to Ms. Dalton when we arrived in Indianapolis. I guess you could say I saw a lot of things and did some exciting stuff that I wanted to remember. Even though I knew I had another audience member, I wrote for myself, and that's how it got so long. My last side note to her in the Italy 2016 journal says, "I have written a lot of stuff down, so thanks for sticking with me."

Ms. Dalton taught me a lot in class and a lot in Italy. I learned by following her lead and her example, and she taught me how to learn by forging my own path. I took the notion that I was an independent adult who has the power to find her own way through life with me as I started my second year of college. I felt like a stronger person after Italy. I left Italy satisfied with

what I'd done; I'd even managed to accomplish the travel goals I wrote in my pre-travel journal, including the one about not getting hopelessly lost. I was proud to have metaphorically left my mark there (we can't all throw up at the Colosseum, I know).

I remember when Ms. Dalton and Dr. Ruebel showed our class *Roman Holiday* at the beginning of the semester and the ending made me sad. I guess I thought that Gregory Peck's and Audrey Hepburn's characters would abandon the lives they were living to be with each other, but instead their holiday ended, and they returned to life as usual. I couldn't have been the only one who felt sort of saddened by this ending, because at the end of class Ms. Dalton said to us, "You'll have to take your broken hearts and go home." I felt the same when we left Italy. So, in a way, I was Audrey Hepburn as Princess Ann because my holiday had to come to an end and I had to return to my regular life. I think the perfect sentence to wrap-up my thoughts on my experience in Italy is from my travel journal, "Before we left I said I was going to make the most of this trip, and damn it I think I did."

ENGLAND 2017

Perchance to Dream (of Studying Shakespeare)

During my senior year of high school, I had an interview for a scholarship at Ball State in which Dr. Barb Stedman asked me if I could study abroad anywhere, where I would like to travel. I told her that all I wanted was to go back to England to learn about Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre. I didn't even know if such a program existed, and I acknowledged that it might be an outlandish request. But I wanted to go over there and see the place where it all began, where Shakespeare's work changed the course of English literature and drama. Much to my surprise, she told me that exact program existed and happens every summer. My seventeen-year-old self was completely taken aback by the potential of this opportunity. I thought, "College is magical. I told her my wildest dream and she handed me the information to make it a reality. She said that you got to spend three weeks in London and perform Shakespeare! They would teach you acting and sword fighting. Sword fighting!" College sounded like a dream, especially for a young thespian who would have given her left arm to take a theatre class instead of AP Microeconomics.

When I returned from Italy in the summer of 2016, I started thinking about how to make my Globe dream happen. My new long-term goal was that Summer 2017 would be spent working hands-on with Shakespeare's plays and revisiting a city I loved so much. I also thought about the ease associated with the European lifestyle and I just thought to myself, "Why can't it be like that over here?" I spent that first year of college very stressed out, even though I was getting to study the things I loved, work with great teachers, and meet my best friends. I saw the deterioration that comes with not taking time for myself and feeling lonely being away from home and everything familiar, wondering if I would fit in at this new school in these new

departments. After returning from Italy, I realized my life could be easier if I were only majoring in one thing, like all the other sane kids were.

I became an Honors student majoring in English Education with minors in Theatre and Gifted & Talented Education who could now graduate on time. This sounded great, but it was a difficult choice for me to make. I never thought I'd be someone who changed her major because I knew I wanted to be a teacher since I was seven-years-old. I had to get it through my thick head that just because I was not going to major in theatre anymore did not mean that I didn't love it, I wasn't passionate about it, I wasn't good at it, I could no longer call myself a theatre person, or that I couldn't teach it to my students. But being a theatre person was my main identifier for so long. I don't know how the average American spends their teen years, but mine were spent listening solely to Broadway cast recordings, watching bootleg videos of performances, and watching the Tony Awards like it was the Super Bowl. I was wary in terms of what my next year of college was going to look like after this shift in my areas of study.

It was one of the best choices I've made. I learned a lot about balancing the different aspects of myself and that it's a lot of work being so multi-faceted. I took this as an opportunity to reinvent myself and create an even better college experience, one that included making my seventeen-year-old self's biggest study abroad dream a reality. One of the many things my sophomore year of college taught me was that planning for international travel is much more difficult when Ms. Dalton isn't taking care of most of the paperwork for you. Who knew? By December 2016, I had been accepted into the Shakespeare's Globe Education Program and knew I would spend June 2017 in London studying the wonder that is William Shakespeare.

As if I weren't already excited to return to England, I took a class all about Jane Austen in Spring 2017 and fell in love with her work. I started researching where the books took place,

where the museums were, where she was buried—the Jane Austen obsession was no laughing matter. I took it quite seriously. Other people may have laughed. But I was too busy taking online quizzes to see which Jane Austen heroine I was, which Bennet sister I was, which Jane Austen character was my soul mate, and overall which literary heroine I was to notice. The answers were Lizzy Bennet, Lizzy Bennet, Mr. Darcy, and Lizzy Bennet, respectively.

A few days before I left for England, I wrote in my pre-travel journal, for an audience of only me this time:

Just think about how over two years ago Dr. Stedman asked if you could go anywhere to study abroad and you said that all you wanted was to study Shakespeare at the Globe.

Now it's happening, sister. My seventeen-year-old self is getting to check another big-ticket item off her bucket list. This definitely will be going in the memoir. This seriously feels like someone scripted this foreshadowing and I'm incredibly grateful for it.

While I was in the process of preparing to abroad all by myself, without a Ms. Dalton or anyone from Ball State, I thought about what we did before going to Italy. I decided that I would write another travel journal for my thirty-year-old self. Although it was also for my twenty-something self, too, because now this trip was connected to my senior thesis and I wanted to make sure I had plenty of source material to use when the time came to actually craft a memoir. My travel goals for my time in London were to learn some Shakespeare, soak up the country that I was becoming obsessed with, thanks to *The Crown*, and think about how on earth I was going to write that thesis from my travel journal.

On June 2, 2017, one week before I was leaving for London, I wrote that I was starting to freak out. Some things never change. This time around I wasn't in the middle of finals week; rather, I was working at my summer job at Staples. I read over my high school travel journal and

wrote down a list of places I wanted to revisit, such as Big Ben, Kensington Palace, and Buckingham Palace. I also made a list of things I wanted to do that I didn't get to the last time. I wanted to see as much theatre as I possibly could because I was going to be in the West End, London's equivalent of Broadway. I wanted to live out all the theatrical and literary obsessions that consumed my life during the past few years. I already knew I was going to follow in Shakespeare's footsteps and go see things connected with Jane Austen. I also wanted to live out Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which was one of my favorite books that my humanities class read that happened to take place in London. Prior to leaving the U.S. I reread the novel to map out the locations the characters visit so I could feel like I was in the book.

Now for my numerous worries about independent travel. At the top of the list was having to navigate multiple airports all by myself, making sure I got on the correct plane and got through security and baggage steps. Again, I had no Ms. Dalton to lead the way (I swear it looked like she knew everything) or even other students that I could follow. Then there was the concept of once I got to London, how would I find the person who is supposed to pick me up from the airport? I didn't have a syllabus or a real itinerary yet for the trip, knew nothing about my assignments or how to turn them in, and didn't even think about whether I should bring copies of the plays we were studying. Packing in general was a nightmare. I classify myself as a planner, so this situation felt ten times messier to me. I like a detailed plan and I didn't have one, hence the mild panic.

And it wouldn't be an international trip for me without worrying if I got lost. But also, what if no one there liked me or wanted to go places with me? What if I didn't like them? What if when I have to fly to Ireland I get lost and confused trying to navigate that airport? And then what if that process gets repeated when I have to fly home from? To conclude the one-week

freak out I wrote, "And being independent is scary. And I know it's okay to be scared, but I don't want to be scared, because I know I'm going to love it so freaking much."

That would've been the conclusion, but current events at the time brought about new fears, ones that I previously thought irrational. I wasn't expecting to write another pre-travel journal entry, but on June 5, 2017, I did. The London Bridge terrorist attack happened on June 4, 2017. A little before that was the bombing in Manchester, which is about 200 miles away from London, so I wasn't letting myself worry about travel since that was far away. But London Bridge is much closer to the Globe. That raised some red flags for me and for my parents. Usually when I'm worrying about something, they aren't; however, this situation was all kinds of scary. But time had taught me that if I was struggling to process my feelings, writing would help. So, I wrote,

I tried not to dwell on it but today I cried. I'm afraid. And it's not that I don't want to go anymore-- it's that I do, and it sucks that it feels like the universe is getting in the way. It sucks that we have to live in a world like this where there seems to be no justice. This feels unreal and unfair. I almost lost it when Mom said she couldn't sleep last night because she was worried about me. Once the option of not going was brought up (that my parents would be okay with it if I backed out) I knew I wouldn't choose it. I can't live with the regret of killing this dream, of throwing away my shot. When Mom said she didn't think it was my destiny to die in London I suggested they place me by Jane Austen [I guess I use humor to get through awkward situations]. Then all I could think about was what I learned from Greek tragedy: you can't escape your fate. So, I probably will not die in London. I also realize I probably stand a higher chance of dying in a car accident this

week than being a casualty in a terrorist attack. And I can't live my life in fear or nothing good at all will happen.

You might be thinking that this seems like twenty-year-old Julia was able to get through to herself and she talked herself off the ledge. Well, that was me trying to convince myself that I could. When my mom was worrying I felt like I should definitely be worrying because usually parents try to fix kids' worries. But this time these were shared worries. My mom didn't know what to say to make me feel better and I didn't know what she could say to make me feel better. But I did know who I wanted to talk to, someone who could get through to me and get me to believe I'd be fine. As I sat with my arms around my knees in my dad's spot at our kitchen table, across from my mom, I kept thinking "I want to email Ms. Dalton."

When she read my email, I'm sure she read through the lines straight to my fear. I had graduated from worried to frightened. You know that scene from *The Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy is talking to Auntie Em through the crystal ball and Judy Garland cries telling her that she's frightened? That's what I felt like. I tried to make it look like I'd calmed myself down, but I'm sure she knew this was a desperate plea for some validation that I would survive and for someone to actually relieve my fears. She wrote me,

Please don't be too frightened, but do be cautious...London, like NYC, is an enormous international city, so the chances of you being in the wrong place at the wrong time are, fortunately, not good... I am excited for you, for you will love most everything about the Globe. You will come home prepared to be the best theatre teacher in the region! Please keep me posted on your experiences. Bon voyage, my dear. I look forward to your updates, you know.

Well, if that didn't snap me out of a funk, I had no idea what would. She said exactly what I needed to hear, and I knew it was all genuine and true. And this coming from her carried extra weight. The conclusion of my pre-travel journal reads, "If I just stop worrying about it then I'm fine. My money has been transferred over, I have an app to help navigate the Tube, we looked at a map of where I'm staying, and I submitted my flight itinerary. Once I get there and situated I know everything will be fine. No, it'll be more than fine. I'll be damned if it's anything short of terrific."

Abandoned in an Alley

June 9, 2017: I was sitting in Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Airport at my gate all by myself. I made it through all the packing, check-in, and security hassles and successfully navigated the airport without getting lost. I wrote in my travel journal, "I even managed not to cry, although I'm pretty sure Mom's eyes were getting a little red and watery. And I don't feel lonely. I just wish I had someone to talk to. Really missing the Italy Squad right now." I looked back at my parents before going down the escalator to find my gate and I remembered the hugs I gave them before getting into the security line. I hoped they weren't sad to see me go, although I was expecting that they'd miss me since they're my parents. Of course, I would miss them, but this was only for a month and I'd been all over the world now, so I wasn't concerned about it that much.



I don't know if my mom cried when they dropped me off at this same airport three years prior for my high school European trip. I'm pretty sure my dad didn't cry after leaving me at the Indianapolis airport with my Italy class. Maybe it was the added threat to the nation's security, but I could see that this felt different to my mom to send me away. Maybe it was the fact that their daughter was twenty and heading out for Europe on her own for the first time. My parents had never left the country before, and I was leaving for my third time.

They told me, like they do each time I leave home to go back to college, "Keep kicking but over Back in the airport where it all began three years earlier, this time traveling there. Kick ass and take some names. Show them what you're made of."

I didn't have to sit by myself, alone with my thoughts for long. I met a friend, Madeline, at the airport who was from northern Kentucky and was coincidentally also doing the Shakespeare's Globe Program. We stuck together and somehow managed to miss where the convenient shuttle was to get us to our gate in Philadelphia for our connecting flight to London, so we walked the better part of a mile and a half to get there. While we were waiting, I heard the final boarding call for a flight to Rome and that hit me in the face with some nostalgia. I missed my class. I also couldn't believe that it had been more than a year since we went to Italy. As I journaled on the plane, "I also realized that the flight is actually only six hours long, but spans twelve with the time change, so tomorrow will be the death march Ms. Dalton promised us last year, but I probably won't be able to escape it this time." I couldn't sleep and my whole body ached; it was probably more like a power nap than an actual night's sleep. But I stole two airplane blankets, so I guess that made up for it.

Our first morning in London started off so well. I wrote in my travel journal, "I've done it, I've left the U.S. three times. We made it through Heathrow and customs without trouble. We found our person holding the sign who was supposed to get us where we need to go. He took us to our party bus. How anyone can drive in this city is beyond me." The part that I was most nervous about, finding out how we were going to get where we needed to be, was over. At least that's what I thought when we boarded the party bus.

Things took a literal detour. Our driver didn't seem to know English or how to find the building we'd be staying in: Ambassador House. I think the language he actually spoke was Portuguese, but none of us knew for certain. I didn't expect there to be a language barrier in *England*. Eventually we ended up pulling over in an alley and he basically abandoned us. Our now ex-chauffeur said, "It is probably not too far from here."

To contribute to an overwhelming day of getting off an international flight and being ditched in the alley, we were also having trouble with cell service (and I wanted my parents to know I was safe). Before I left, my dad showed me on the street view of Google Maps what to look for. It was a white building with pillars in the Kensington district. That entire district is made of old, white buildings with pillars. And I guess no one in London is out before ten in the morning, so there were only a few construction workers out that we could ask for directions. Can you believe they didn't know how to find this random building that housed international students? We walked around in circles and I felt a little helpless. I couldn't remember anything from the map and was getting frustrated with my poor navigational skills.

Eventually, our maps, paper and Google, got us to where we would live for the next three weeks. I was so glad I opted for the service of the company bringing me to where I was supposed to live because I knew that if I had to find it on my own I would be perpetually lost. The most insightful reflection I made in my travel journal regarding that experience was the profound, philosophical question, "What's sketchier, being ushered into a stranger's white van in Italy or being abandoned in an alley in England?"

I met my roommates that evening before going to dinner and told them the story about how three of us were abandoned in an alley. We joined a group of students from the Shakespeare program, in addition to students taking other classes in London, at a pub down the street. My travel journal from that night reads, "I'd never been to a pub before and I didn't drink since I was already so tired and was mostly with strangers and wasn't one hundred percent sure how to get back home sober...I guess I was feeling pretty antisocial, or maybe it was where I was sitting (and the other students I was sitting with), but all I wanted was for dinner to be over so I could go back to my room."

By this point I was exhausted and I just wanted to sleep. But I wasn't about to let jet lag beat me. I knew if I slept now my sleep schedule would get all out of whack. No, this was not my first time abroad, I was going to show Europe who was calling the shots.

It was difficult to enjoy dinner since I was exhausted and because everyone was being far too loud. I'm pretty sure the entire floor cleared out because of us. As a group we definitely fulfilled that American stereotype. I was trying to keep a low profile.

You know what else I found kind of appalling? Some of the other students didn't seem prepared for international travel. I recognize that I tend to go overboard with preparation, but I think there are some things people should know before they travel. For example, it would be a good idea to know what kind of currency a country uses. Another student was going to participate in the optional weekend trip to Paris and actually asked us at dinner what kind of money France uses. I don't know if it was because I'd traveled before, but I was thinking "How do you not know? How did you get this far without knowing? Like, what was your plan? Heck, the odds of you guessing they used euros were good enough."

When I first went overseas, I remember wanting to know logistics like the currency and cultural differences before arriving, so I could be prepared. My parents also didn't want me to be clueless while wandering foreign countries at seventeen. While I may not have had a lot of preparation in terms of language before my first trip, our teachers did make sure we knew to transfer our U.S. dollars into pounds and euros. I don't think I even knew what questions to ask before leaving for Europe the first time, but the adults took more responsibility in terms of preparing me. So, thank goodness our teachers had a premade list of things, based on their prior experiences and knowledge, they thought the uninformed travelers should know. In that case, I guess I can see how someone from our study abroad group was unprepared by my standards; I

guess I assumed that someone in their twenties would naturally know more about international travel, even if they hadn't done it before.

And after my experience spending an entire semester learning about Rome and Florence before visiting, I got hooked on the idea of being an informed traveler. I didn't have a class to provide me with information on London or Shakespeare before studying abroad this time. I wasn't concerned with preparing by studying more about Shakespeare before arriving in London because the whole point of my program was to teach me Shakespeare, plus I thought I already had a decent set of background knowledge. I also didn't do any extra research on the history and influence of London itself, rather I only looked up places I wanted to visit. I thought that I knew enough about European travel that I could hold my own over there. I was mostly concerned about how to navigate an airport, which ended up not being a significant issue, that acted as a metaphor for my underlying worry that I might not be able to how to successfully travel alone. But then I remembered that I at least knew the country's currency, and that helped remind me that I was doing all right.

Once I got back to my room, at least it would be mine until my two roommates made it back from the pub, I started thinking. Just when you thought the worrying would be over, here we go for round two. When I started reflecting on the day's experiences, I wrote:

So, then I got back to the room and was all by myself, feeling incredibly lonely. I want my friends with me. I know these people will become my friends and I'll hate to see them go, but right now I just feel awkward. I'm worried that I'm not having fun, a good time, that I don't fit in, what if the experience isn't everything I hoped. I have no one familiar at all here. I just feel alone and lost and I'm terrified that I'm all on my own. Maybe it's

this no turning back aspect, that I can't undo any of it. And this is now the present, no longer the future, soon to be a memory.

Once again, talking or writing to myself wasn't enough to calm me down. I made two phone calls, one to each of my parents. I felt like a child during those tearful phone calls to my mommy and daddy because I was lonely and tired. I wished that Ms. Dalton were here, as someone familiar and someone in charge of my well-being, so I wouldn't have to be. My dad told me that no matter what happened, even if this experience completely sucked, I would still learn so much and I would be able to turn it into a good story. These calls reminded me of when I was in high school traveling abroad and I felt bad for crying because I thought it looked like I didn't want to be there, or wasn't happy to be there, or even that I was ungrateful to be there. Why would something I looked forward to for so long and dreamed about for years be making me cry? And not the right kinds of tears.

I think this episode was when I learned that when I have an overwhelming day, I need to take that step back, which is easier said than done for me, and just take care of myself. What I should have done was read or nap, or any other stress relieving activity on my first full day abroad. What I actually did was run around the city heading to the museum to get a head start on checking things off my to-do list. This was the longest time I'd spent in a foreign country and I knew there would be lots of time to go see things, but I also knew how fast weeks could go by. Later I would end up taking another trip to that same museum, which further proves that I didn't need to rush through things and I should've remembered the European lifestyle lessons I picked up from Italy. But my determination to soak up the place got in the way and I was trying to put Britain first instead of myself.

Even though I was tired and full of emotions, I was still observant enough to think that I'd seen this place before. Something about being in this part of London felt familiar. When I wrote that night's travel journal I said, "I feel like we drove past here in high school and I remember wondering what it would be like to live there." Well, twenty-year-old Julia, I can tell you now that you did in fact go through there in high school. The Gloucester Road stop on the Tube was where our hotel was, according to my 2014 travel journal, and that was the Tube station closest to our dorms in 2017. And now I didn't have to wonder what it would be like to live there.

But fortunately, on that first night in England, I got some good sleep, even though our beds were basically cots with springs that jabbed me in the ribs and bounced back the next day ready to get started with the program.

A Professional Academic, A Director, and A Script Analyst Walk Into a Theater

When I studied Shakespeare at the Globe (that sounds so awesome and probably a little pretentious, but I love saying that) I worked with many teachers. We devoted most of our time to text analysis, historical and social context of Elizabethan theatre, and performing Shakespeare in the Globe space. Our supplemental classes taught us voice, movement, historical dance and music, and sword fighting. All of this would culminate in the three weeks' time in an abridged performance of *Twelfth Night*.

Our first teacher who became a constant in our schedule, and in our lives at the time, was Dr. Miranda Fay Thomas. We met her on our first day at the Globe and she was the first professional academic I met who was not a full-time professor. I learned later that she was only nine years older than I. Nine years older with a PhD and teaching Shakespeare at the Globe while wearing leather leggings. I recognized that she was young and relatable, but I didn't realize how soon I could be walking in her shoes. I found it empowering to see someone young that I thought was so accomplished. I have no idea where I'll be in nine years, but I'd like to be teaching Shakespeare to the next generation of thespians. Before doing this program, I didn't know that the Globe had so many programs for students of all ages to explore theatre and the magic of William Shakespeare. Maybe in nine years that's where I'll be, too.

On our first day at the Globe, Miranda gave us a tour of the space. She took us into the Globe itself and into the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, which I didn't even know existed. It's a smaller, indoor theater that is set up similar to the Globe that the company uses for a variety of performances. She showed us everywhere we would need to go in the building and answered our questions about what London was like. My favorite question was this one: Is there only one red

telephone booth that everyone hunts down to take a picture with when they visit London. The answer: No, there's one on practically every street corner.

Over the course of the program, Miranda also taught us about the context of Shakespeare's text, particularly the fact that throughout history England looked down on theatre and saw it as lesser than other art forms and professions. I liked how the background on Elizabethan theatre went beyond the surface level facts that



The first of many red telephone booths I saw in London.

I'd heard since freshman year of high school that the groundlings stood for performances, Shakespeare was from Stratford-upon-Avon, and he wrote in iambic pentameter. Her lessons were also a reminder that performers and audiences had different expectations of theatre than we do today. In my theatre classes in college, our professors stressed the importance of understanding the script as a whole, not just your character's arc. But Shakespeare's actors didn't have full scripts; they only received the portions of the script they were featured in, which made it rather difficult when people started organizing anthologies of Shakespeare's plays, like the First Folio. Miranda showed us how theatre was a reflection of their time. Furthermore, she showed us how the performance we would create would reflect our time at the Globe and illustrate our growth over those three weeks.

Working with Miranda reiterated to me that learning does not stop once you have a degree in your hand. Before studying at the Globe, I knew that I would be a lifelong learner and try to instill that philosophy in my students, too. But I hadn't encountered many other adults who were not educators that I witnessed implementing that same practice. There are many things that

I still do not know about Shakespeare's work, and the same can be said for Miranda or any other scholar. The difference is the amount of experience we have had finding answers to our lingering questions and the ways we know to go about searching for those answers. Even if I become a renowned Shakespearean scholar, there will be things I don't know. So, it's okay that I don't know everything about Shakespeare, theatre, or literature now. What's important is to keep asking questions and eagerly pursue answers, as I first learned from Ms. Dalton. Hopefully by setting an example like that, I can inspire my students to learn long after my class.

The next constant in our lives was our director, Joanne Howarth; we called her Jo. If Miranda reminded me of what I thought my near-future self could be, Jo made me think of what I could be at my grandparents' age. That is, if my grandparents were a small British woman with more energy than a room of twenty-somethings combined, running around quoting Shakespeare. We saw her nearly every day for those three weeks. She challenged us to expand our understanding of Shakespeare and from the first day I could tell she had so much faith in us. This woman has worked with professional actors, and is a professional actor, so her believing in us meant a lot. I mean, she has taught Shakespeare across the world from England to the United States and China. I'm not sure why I was surprised that Jo believed our group of American students with varying prior experiences with Shakespeare could do justice to *Twelfth Night*, but I valued her support.

Jo urged us to form a community of actors and work as a team to stretch our thinking skills, whether it was remembering everyone's names and simultaneously throwing a ball to someone standing across the circle from you or questioning the double *entendres* within a character's speech. She gave us a new lens to through which to perform Shakespeare. Jo taught us about how to fill the space, even if one of us was the only person onstage. I'd never thought

about how much metaphorical space I take up before. But Jo told us that a single person can fill the entire Globe. Jo had us run all over our rehearsal room to literally fill the space and then we added our lines to fill the metaphorical plane. She was determined to teach us new tricks to help us understand and perform Shakespeare, and I appreciated how she emphasized that we should use what works best for us. This art form is not a one-size-fits-all. If it were, then I don't think it would truly be art.

Learning at the Globe broke down and reformed what I thought was my basic understanding of theatre, English, and, I suppose, everything that's important to me. One day, Jo's lesson was about speaking Shakespeare. As someone studying English at the undergraduate level, I thought I was familiar with the concept of connotation. But then we dissected how the sounds of consonants and vowels paired up created emotion and structure within the words. I thought I'd finally become fluent in the English language after speaking it for almost two decades, but I was wrong. I'd never thought about how the sounds of the words, as opposed to what the words were, created as much of the scene. This concept especially came to light when we noticed the differences when one reads Shakespeare with an American accent as opposed to a British accent.

Jo asked us to mark in our text each of the rhymes and was confused that we had missed the rather obvious rhyme between "what" and "not." We each responded by stating that those two words don't rhyme, and she realized that our differing pronunciations would in fact change our analysis of the language. I read Shakespeare in a different voice than it was written for. I knew that linguistically the English language has evolved in both England and the U.S., so even in Britain they are speaking Shakespeare's words differently than his contemporaries would have. None of this had ever crossed my mind before; I just thought my voice sounded weird

when reading Shakespeare, probably because I don't usually speak with a British accent. Was I not doing justice to Shakespeare's language by reciting it with an American accent? But Jo told me that my American accent didn't sound weird and this woman has dedicated her life to studying Shakespeare, so I believe her.

While I am familiar with the idea that Shakespeare intimidates students, I think Shakespeare can also be intimidating to performers because these plays are complex and revered, which adds to the pressure to perform well. Working with Jo as our director was a great learning opportunity for me as a performer because I learned how important a performance environment, not just a classroom environment, is to facilitating growth. My experience at the Globe wasn't about proving what I knew about Shakespeare; it was about sharing the knowledge and insights I gained through my performance. Something that I have found challenging is this notion, in audition rooms especially, of feeling as though I need to prove myself. I don't think that's an atmosphere conducive to artistic growth. Since Jo believed in us right off the bat, I didn't feel as though I needed to prove to her that I could act, comprehend, or interpret Shakespeare. Instead, she helped me do those things better. That doesn't mean it was easy and that I didn't doubt myself at times, but it was a more positive experience. As a theatre teacher, I want to establish this type of atmosphere with my young thespians. I want them to know I believe in their storytelling and for them to feel comfortable sharing what they can do and be open to learning more.

And my final Shakespeare teacher at the Globe who left a lasting impression on me was Emily Jenkins. I don't know which future self of mine she exemplified, mostly because I'm not sure how old she was. But I hope that my future self who is an established teacher is a lot like her because she was smart, engaging, and made textual analysis fun. We only had two classes with

Emily and I don't think she was able to come to our performance. She taught us about the structure of prose and verse. I can honestly say I left with the most understanding I've ever had of iambic pentameter. Somehow, I'd been reading Shakespeare for years and just then learned that when reciting it you shouldn't count the syllables because it'll throw you off. I liked how she organized our first class to teach us the basics of the language and then our second class would be where we applied it to our scenes from *Twelfth Night*. If she can make such an impression on me with two classes, then perhaps I can make a difference in my students' lives after an entire school year.

As a teacher, I appreciated how on the first day of class Emily asked if it would be beneficial for us if she devoted the next meeting to answering our specific questions about our scenes from *Twelfth Night*, and then threw out whatever original lesson plan she had to do that. She was so adaptable and willing to change her plans to better prepare us. While we only had a couple of hours with her, I was in awe of the immense knowledge she had about Shakespeare's text and her grasp of the language itself. This woman could take any line of text and recite it in the original pronunciation, for crying out loud. She said her British accent was the worst accent to read Shakespeare, so she used a different British accent when reciting Shakespeare in the original pronunciation. I guess it's not just my accent that sounds weird. We would reference a scene and without saying which act or line numbers she could start reciting the character's lines word for word, stressing the correct syllables, without missing a beat. Does Emily have the complete works of Shakespeare memorized? I wouldn't be surprised if she did. Simply listening to her talk about Shakespeare, I knew I was in the presence of someone who was enthusiastic about what she was teaching, which she made especially evident through her rants about punctuation.

Emily's classes resonated with me as an English teacher because she demonstrated why it was so important to understand the play on a textual, syntactical level. I once had a classmate argue that we should only be teaching Shakespeare through a theatrical lens, rather than a literary one, because his plays were written to be heard and performed instead of read. While I understood the intentions Shakespeare had with his work I do not think we should be eliminating our studies of his plays through a literary lens. How is someone supposed to perform the text and do dramatic analysis of the action if they don't understand what the words mean? I hope to teach my students Shakespeare from both theatrical and literary perspectives because I think that provides a more holistic view of his works. I felt that Emily's emphasis on the English-y side of Shakespeare helped me better understand *Twelfth Night*, thus improving my scenes.

Getting to study under these ladies' direction and guidance was a privilege. I got to be in the presence of actual Shakespearean scholars and learn from them as they shared their insights (and pictures of their dogs). I am still in awe of them because of how much they know and how well they've honed their crafts. I have been enthralled by William Shakespeare since I was fourteen-years-old; six years later, I felt as though I'd truly found other grown-ups like me, hardcore obsessing over Shakespeare, lucky enough to make their living off this passion. Granted, I had to travel all the way to England to find them, but at least I know that they are out there!

Brush Up Your Shakespeare

Luckily for me, a woman ever so navigationally challenged, for our first trip to the Globe we had someone from AIFS take us there. I am proud to say that after spending three weeks in



London I could explain how to get from the Gloucester Tube stop to the Mansion House Tube stop and then where to walk to get to the Globe. As we got closer to the Globe, we saw swarms of school children in matching uniforms on a field trip. I wrote in my travel journal, "And I actually cried because of how amazing it is that this is where they live, and they're introduced to Shakespeare at such a young age. It was just so incredible and beautiful to me." I was also jealous that I had to

The outside of Shakespeare's Globe.

wait more than twenty years to make it to the Globe and these kids can go with school at any time. They can see Shakespeare's theater, (okay, not the exact same one because it burned down and the original site is now an apartment complex with a plaque stating that in this place used to be Shakespeare's Globe) and be introduced to England's theatrical Renaissance. As with my experiences seeing kids on field trips when I was in Rome, I had many questions as to if these kids understood Shakespeare's significance and that people traveled from other countries to experience his legacy.



The Globe was my school for three weeks.

For our program, we studied *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet* but would only perform *Twelfth Night* at the end of the three weeks. We

also got to watch both plays performed at the Globe, which is why they were the two chosen for us to study. We compared the scripts with the performances to analyze how these adaptations held up to our expectations. I felt as though my personal Shakespeare experience came full circle since *Romeo and Juliet* was the first play I read in my ninth grade English class. I'd never read *Twelfth Night* but was excited to learn a new text and get one play closer to my long-term goal of reading every Shakespeare play.

After our first lecture with Miranda about the history and context of theatre in London, she took us into the Globe. Then we were finally on par with the elementary school field trip. How can I describe to a potentially non-theatre person (because I should hate to make assumptions about who is reading my work) what it was like walking into the Globe? Even though it wasn't the original theater, I felt a connection to Shakespeare and all the other Elizabethans who would have watched his plays. This was the site of the rebirth of western theatre. I had stepped into an ancient Roman theater and now the Globe. It was like Dionysus was looking down on me that day. I wrote, "A lot of people thought the Globe was a lot smaller than they expected, but it kind of felt just right to me (without making that sound too much like Goldilocks)."

When I think back on my first experiences with Shakespeare, reading *Romeo and Juliet* in ninth grade, and how nervous I was that I wouldn't be able to understand what was going on, I wish I could tell my fourteen-year-old self how much enjoyment I would get out of putting that dramatic puzzle together. Getting to study that play again as a twenty-year-old at the Globe only increased my love for the play as I discovered more of the intricacies of the characters. I had spent years thinking that Juliet wasn't a great character because both Juliet and Romeo were too impulsive and the whole ordeal regarding their relationship could have been handled much

better. At least, that's what I remembered of my fourteen-year-old self's understanding of *Romeo and Juliet*.

During one of our discussions with Miranda, I realized that Juliet has more agency than we give her credit for, especially when you consider that she is only thirteen. Juliet actually has more power than Romeo. On a basic level, she has more lines and Romeo is absent for a lot of the play once he gets banished. The play becomes more about her and the events are filtered through a Capulet lens. We never get to see the Montagues' perspectives after the prince exiles Romeo to Mantua. Even when Romeo and Juliet meet, he picks up her rhymes while trying to show off and woo her. Miranda mentioned that after Romeo and Juliet speak their one and only Shakespearean sonnet, they can't form another sonnet because they get interrupted by the Nurse; they have to skip to the rhyming couplets at the end. Miranda said, "Thus, ending the sonnet before its time, like how Romeo and Juliet end their lives prematurely." While the play starts off as *Romeo and Juliet*, it ends with Juliet and her Romeo. Holy Shakespeare.

Looking at Juliet's character in a new light, viewing her as a young adult (if we want to consider thirteen-years-old an adult for the sake of the argument, because she does handle some pretty adult things) with independence and agency, struck a chord with me as I tested my own agency as a solo traveler. Granted, I wasn't looking to Juliet for advice on how to make decisions, but it changed things for me since she was no longer a rash and impulsive teenager. Neither was I.

The workshop that I think had the greatest impact on how I would teach acting to my future theatre students, and how I would direct them, was our indoor playing workshop with Collin. We got to practice in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, running all over the stage and through the house. We were constantly in motion, doing various acting exercises and games, so I

couldn't actually take notes like a good student. I had to rely on my memory as I quickly jotted down everything I could remember about the experience.

I thought the most remarkable concept was the three circles theory that relates to an actor's metaphorical space. The first circle is you, your soliloquy in which you speak aloud your character's thoughts. The second circle is dialogue, in which the actor is interacting with someone else in the scene. The third circle is called "Hey everybody!" where the actor interacts with the audience to break down the fourth wall. At the Globe, we were taught that there shouldn't be a fourth wall; it's more like a fourth window. As actors, we get caught up with transmitting when we should be receiving, which basically means that when you are performing you are not reciting. Instead, you're sharing something with the audience and allowing them to come into your world.

Again, I loved that our teachers emphasized that we should use whatever tools work for us. I wrote in my travel journal that Collin said, "These gems are tools when they're helpful. They're rules when they're constricting. Shakespeare gives you the words and the audience gets the punctuation." The audience shouldn't be ignored, because the words land with them in a variety of ways, depending on the actor's interpretation of the lines. Furthermore, with a text as complex as Shakespeare's there are multiple correct interpretations, which is what I want my students to have the freedom to explore.

A Thousand Years of Royals

My first full day in England started a lot like my first day in England during my high school trip. Our study abroad group took a bus tour around the tourist sites everyone sees when they go to London. This was my first time revisiting a European country and I could look out the window and recognize these landmarks from my own experiences, not just from pictures online or in books. I still had my seventeen-year-old self's wonder and amazement as we passed Hyde Park, Royal Albert Hall, Westminster Abbey, Big Ben (still leaning to the right), Buckingham Palace, the houses of Parliament, and the London Eye from a distance.

As we walked along the streets, I noticed the juxtaposition of the old and modern architecture throughout the city that I didn't notice the last time. We'd see a row of old buildings and then there would be a random 21st century building sticking out. Why would they tear down just that building to construct something new? We asked our temporary tour guide, Trudy, and she told us that the sites where the modern buildings are were spots where London was bombed during World War II. That hit me more than I thought it would. It was like I could imagine the fear and terror of something that even my grandparents weren't alive to see. So much physical and psychological destruction happened there, and I'd never thought about it until then. So, yes, I would say that the three years separating my visits to England changed my perspective on the world, and from that first day I knew I was going to be seeing things differently.

This time around, I made the conscious decision to change the way I looked at the city. By that I mean I wasn't going to live through the lens of my camera. On my first trip to Europe I took more than one thousand pictures in eight days. I took pictures of anything and everything that seemed different from home because I didn't want to forget a thing. I also found everything to be fascinating simply because it was in England. Seeing a fast food chain was about as

exciting as seeing a famous work of art. It was Ms. Dalton who told us before going to Italy not to do that. That's not truly experiencing a new place. She told us to look at something for five seconds and if it was something we liked and wanted to take a picture of, then we should take the picture. As a result, my pictures from Italy meant more to me and I remembered more of what was in those pictures. On this trip to England, I'd already seen so much, and I knew how to be a photographer. I didn't have to live through the camera and I'm proud to say that I didn't. I actually went out and experienced things rather than just clicking the button on my phone to save the image. It's like I got to redo my first London trip, and redoes don't come around that often, so I knew I wasn't going to waste it.

One of the most memorable revisits during my time in England was the Tower of London. I thought I'd been there before, but I'd apparently forgotten 90 percent of what my first



experience was like. All I remembered were the crown jewels and torture devices. I was a little worried about going because the Tower of London is close to London Bridge, but I sucked it up and went with Elizabeth, who became my travel buddy for the next three weeks. I later wrote in my travel journal that "I thought I would be more afraid to be in that

Potential threats aside, this picture by London area, but we didn't walk across the bridge or anything, and everything was fine, so I can breathe a little."

Elizabeth didn't seem concerned about being in that area and I figured that she was a more skilled adult, since she was twenty-eight, so I trusted her.

I walked the paths that the King Henrys, Richards, Edwards, etc., walked centuries before. I saw the spot where the bodies of the nine- and twelve-year-old princes, who may have been executed by their uncle Richard III, were found. If I knew before, I forgot that the Tower of London was almost 1,000 years old. I left this tour with so many random facts. For example, Anne Boleyn is buried in the Church of St. Peter ad Vincula, along with Henry's other ex-wife Catherine Howard.



One of the many "towers" at the Tower of London.

We went inside and saw their graves. Talk about getting up close and personal with history. I've heard the story about Henry VIII and his wives so many times, but being near two graves made this story from history seem more factual to me.

Our tour guide gave us a "so what" to go along with all these facts about British history. He said that people don't talk about all the bad things from history and that we often romanticize historical figures who did some awful things. Even Queen Elizabeth I had people executed, but she's still a badass if you ask me. But we need to be talking about our mistakes to learn from them so as to not repeat them. To solidify this point, he cautioned us against buying the Henry VIII and his six wives Christmas ornament set in the gift shop, as it would be like, "going to your mate's flat and noticing they had an ornament of Adolf Hitler--you should be concerned!" And when we were standing by Anne Boleyn's grave, he told us that she wasn't liked in her time since it was such a scandal that King Henry VIII was split with Catherine of Aragon. Centuries later, people now lay roses on her grave on the anniversary of her execution.

I most definitely did not get this philosophical when I visited the Tower of London as a junior in high school. Everything that our tour guide said was true and made me wonder how

society determines who gets to decide what actions get pardoned, celebrated, or condemned. I'd always heard that history is told through the eyes of the winner. I hadn't thought about how the winners were able to rewrite their stories, and glorify bad people, based on their choices of how we remember and portray people.

When I saw the crown jewels again I could have sworn the entire building looked different. Either they changed their setup, or my memory was lacking. There was still a moving sidewalk to take passengers by some jewels, which was the extent of my high school memory. I didn't know that the jewels from Queen Victoria's crown were removed and put into the one Queen Elizabeth II has. Under the arch on that crown there are four pearls, two of which may have belonged to Queen Elizabeth I. I saw more than 12,314 diamonds that day. Holy cow. Everything seemed so connected in their history and this was a physical representation of the history I wanted to be a part of. Our tour guide told those of us from America, "Welcome home. This all could've been yours if you'd paid your bloody taxes." I'd always wondered as a child whether England was still mad at us for leaving them. I'm still unsure. But I do know that I thought about paying my taxes to hang out in England for a while longer. I thought that maybe if I kept trying to use crisper diction and speaking a little higher I could come home with the British accent my parents were dreading. I did write in my travel journal that, "I didn't really expect culture shock in England. I guess I thought I had Europe figured out, plus no language barrier, so I built up England to be a posher America." I was right that the parts of England I saw were definitely posher, but I did not have all of Europe figured out, not even all of London.

When I visited London the first time, I joked that it would be so cool if I got to see the queen, which my family and friends dismissed since that possibility was slim to none. That didn't stop me from saying it again before traveling to London this time. Again, everyone

laughed and said it would be impressive if I accomplished my goal of seeing the queen. Well, on June 17, 2017, I did. We happened to be studying at the Globe in June, which is when the Trooping of the Colour parade is. The parade is in honor of the queen's birthday, which is actually in April, but the weather is much nicer in June, so they wait to celebrate in the summer. The majority of our group spent the day at Stonehenge, but I wasn't interested in looking at thousands of years old rocks all day. Those will be around forever. You know who sadly won't? The queen. I went with my friend Elizabeth to watch the parade and it was easily my favorite parade-going experience.

We got up early to go out to breakfast and planned to take the Tube down to St. James' Park. When we got to the station both the District and Circle lines weren't running. Our resourceful selves decided to walk to the next closest Tube station at High Street Kensington and see if we could go from there. No, we could not. The lines were down everywhere. I guess if you were a local you would have realized that and found another route. We then decided to take the bus to Green Park and walk the rest of the distance, only we hadn't taken a bus yet, so we had to figure that out, too. Since we left early, we arrived before the parade started and were still able to get a good spot underneath a tree, right up next to the barricades.

At the time, our only focus was to find a way to make it to the parade on time. I wasn't thinking about how we were able to make decisions in the moment to get ourselves from Point A to Point B when our first plan didn't work. Our collective knowledge of how to navigate London was based on following the Google Maps walking directions. We didn't have the advantage of an older adult like a teacher, tour guide, or even a local to lead the way. But we were never concerned that we couldn't figure out the directions, so it didn't feel like we had to persevere to reach a solution. This was a much easier experience for me than trying to find my way after

being left in an alley. And this was a small victory that raised my confidence that I could rely on myself and my resources, despite my directionally challenged nature, to travel efficiently.

I'm not sure if what I observed at this parade is characteristic of all British parades, but it took much longer than any American parade I attended. The procession was not a continuous flow of people. There was also a lack of marching bands, fire trucks, and people throwing candy at people's faces. One group went by and then there would be a fifteen-minute break before anyone else passed. So many groups of red guards marching with guns, marching with instruments, or rode horses while carrying instruments. There were also guards and police officers stationed every five feet around the barricades. As exciting as it was to see so many members of the British law enforcement, I was getting antsy waiting to see some royals.

I love how excited everyone got whenever members of the royal family came by. I wouldn't have been nearly as excited if I were watching a Congressional parade in Washington, D.C. I don't know what Britain's public opinion of them is, but everyone at the parade was elated to see carriages pass with Prince Harry, Kate Middleton, and Charles and Camilla. At the time, I couldn't identify Princess Beatrice and Princess Eugenie, but after looking through my pictures I know we saw them, too. William was in the parade, but he wasn't riding with Kate and Harry, so I don't remember when we saw him, but I know we did. This was months before Prince Harry's engagement to Meghan Markle was announced, so I was still under the impression I could catch his attention and join the royal family. After I'd been home for a few months, before everyone started obsessing over the next royal wedding, everyone was talking about Kate Middleton's third pregnancy. And Princess Eugenie also announced her engagement after I'd been in the U.S. for a few months. I'm not saying that I influenced any of these pieces

of good news, but it's oddly coincidental that these three announcements were made shortly after I visited.

Then came the highlight of my whole day: Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. I think I was in shock. A state of total disbelief. Hi Lizzie! I have pictures to prove it. The next rational



This picture is worth a thousand words from my twenty-year-old self fangirling over royalty.

thing to do after they were out of my range of vision was to post them on social media and text them to my parents when it was the middle of the night their time, so they'd wake up reading, "I SAW THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND!" I also enjoyed that the parade route was a circle, so the participants came back around, and I can now say

I've seen the queen twice. We had to wait for about an hour, now in the sun because it had shifted and the tree we were standing under was no longer providing shade. My clothes may have been soaked and sticking to my skin, but that didn't matter because I got to see Queen Elizabeth II twice.

It meant so much more to me seeing the queen on this trip than it would've been had I seen her when I was in high school, mostly because Netflix didn't release *The Crown* until 2016. I fell in love with Claire Foy's portrayal of her and I learned more about the British monarchy and her life. I think the queen is wonderful and she's a strong, independent woman who has had to carry the entire monarchy on her shoulders for more than 60 years now. She was such a badass, just like Queen Elizabeth I, except I think this Elizabeth has had far fewer people executed. I think she's the epitome of getting stuff done, looking fabulous while doing it, and not letting anyone push her around. And all my feelings were validated when I saw her in person.

On this trip abroad, I had the most control over my experience. I could go anywhere and do anything at almost any given time. That's a lot of power. I wanted to make sure that I was using it correctly and getting as much out of England as I could because I didn't know if and when I'd be back. Maybe another three years or thirty years. I started to obsess over this concept and I wrote in my travel journal:

There's a part of me that feels like I'm not doing, seeing, or experiencing enough. Even though I'm out all day, it doesn't feel like the days are as packed as Italy. After a day in Italy I felt fulfilled like I'd done a lot. Also, I think that comparing this whole trip to Italy is going to do me more harm than good. It's like Trip #1 was tourist, Trip #2 was tourist (but not being a total tourist because we were informed) with a class that took place through sightseeing and some cultural immersion. Now it's cultural immersion and classes and tourist. I think I'm just struggling to understand that doing any of these things is experiencing London. Like Mom said, even if I'm just reading a book, I'm reading a book in London. And there's so much time to see and do a bunch of things-- I think not having it on the itinerary like last time is what's throwing me off.

I thought that if you only live your life through books, never doing anything yourself, you're not really living. I think that's what Belle was trying to tell us. That's the real moral of *Beauty and the Beast* and probably the greatest revelation I had in England (okay, that's probably an exaggeration, but the sentiment is still true). I was there to do things myself. I went and had experiences I couldn't have had by staying home. Jane Austen wrote in *Northanger Abbey*, "If adventure will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad" (Austen 8). I sought it abroad for the third time and adventure did befall me, just as it had twice before.

Exit, Stage Right

On our first day of school, we were introduced to Jo, who told us right away that one of the goals for our production of *Twelfth Night* was to build a company of actors among us. I was a little nervous that first day because I was a little rusty in terms of performing. I hadn't acted for an audience since my Acting I class during the fall of 2015, unless I counted those times I rapped *Hamilton* in Italy. I'd wanted to perform in college, but that was a substantial time commitment. If I already couldn't get the recommended amount of sleep, I didn't think I would be able to properly devote time to my art. That was also a convenient excuse because I'm afraid of auditioning and dislike rejection, both of which contributed to my thoughts that I wasn't good enough. I wrote in my travel journal, "This makes me a little nervous and worried that I'm a complete phony as a thespian, especially since I've never studied Shakespeare performance, only through a literary lens. I'm sure it'll be fine but I'm just psyching myself out over whether I'll be any good."

I have been passionate about theatre since the ninth grade and was determined to attend school solely to study musical theatre until the beginning of my senior year. Even though no one was telling me I wasn't good enough, just that it was difficult to have a stable career and life in the theatre, I had serious doubts about my abilities. If I'm not convinced that I'm good enough, how am I supposed to convince the people in the audition room? I realized that I am a person who needs constant validation and affirmation in her life, and I was not going to be able to rely on theatre to provide that for me.

Even when I was majoring in theatre I felt as though there was a disconnect between myself and my peers. I kept fixating on the thought that I wasn't as good as everyone else and wondered if I belonged there. That thought crept into my intellectual life as well and I thought I

was floundering, even though I knew I was smart and talented, because you needed both of those things to make it into the major in the first place. I had to have been doing something right. But I never quite got over all of that, which resurfaced at the Globe.

During our introductions to Jo, and again to the rest of our group, we had to state our name, school, what we were studying, and a significant connection or story that we had with William Shakespeare. I shared a story about the time when I was a student helper for my favorite teacher, Mrs. Hines, during my senior year of high school. I helped her English 10 Honors class. Part of the reason I was so excited to be in her class was that the class was going to study *Hamlet*, which I wanted to study in the tenth grade, but we read *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing* instead. I explained that I wanted to go to college to become an English and theatre teacher like her and how I read along with her class from my anthology of Shakespeare's plays that looks more like a cinder block than a book. I took my own notes because I genuinely wanted to learn and was fascinated with the story; it has remained my favorite ever since. I told them when I cried thinking about Hamlet and Ophelia, mostly because I was questioning if he did love her, if he was actually crazy, and because Ophelia has no control over the bad things happening to her. I ended my story by reiterating that my love for *Hamlet* is true. Then Jo said, "I can see it in your eyes," which warmed my heart.

By the second scene rehearsal, we had groups formed for our scenes from *Twelfth Night*. My group was the only group of all women, with Elizabeth, Mary, Lexi, Hayley, and one of my roommates, Zoe. I paired up with Elizabeth because we had similar levels of prior performing experience. Elizabeth was studying vocal performance for her second bachelor's degree, so she had a little more professional experience than I did with my one-woman Broadway shows performed in my car. Our group's scene was Act I Scene V, between Olivia and Viola at Olivia's

house. Our three pairs would alternate performing the lines. Elizabeth was going to play Viola and I would play Olivia.

Everyone else seemed to be obsessed with how great Viola's character was, and I'm not denying the fact that she's a badass, but when I first read the play I connected more with Olivia and knew I wanted to play her. I liked her sass and I think I secretly wanted to be an old timey aristocrat. Olivia is the lady of the house after the recent deaths of her father and brother. She's trying to avoid proposals from Orsino while also mourning the loss of her family. Viola arrives in the country disguised as a man named Cesario and works for Orsino to persuade Olivia to marry him. Well, Olivia falls in love with Cesario instead. Through all of this, Olivia is tough and doesn't let anyone push her around.

The coolest lesson that day was about the shifts in power dynamics and the characters' struggles for power within the play. I was familiar with analyzing a character's wants, motivations, tactics, etc., from my theatre classes, but this idea of power was a new game. We revisited this concept of power throughout the program and it stuck with me. I found it revolutionary to look at *Twelfth Night*, or any play for that matter, as a massive game of psychological chess. Who has the power in a scene? Who is trying to take it away? How and why does a character acquire power? This concept of power and control in a work of theatre or literary fiction fascinates me and I continue to question the power dynamics of each story I read now.

At our next scene rehearsal, Jo focused on making sure we knew exactly what we were saying. Not only did she want to make sure we had marked which lines were ours, but more importantly, she wanted to help us figure out what our characters were trying to convey. In character groups we worked out backstories. We went through our scripts and made decisions

regarding whether our lines were directed towards ourselves, another character, or the audience. Jo said her goal was for us to truly know what we were saying, not just what the translation into modern English was. She sat with each of our groups and went through the text line by line, asking if we knew who we were talking to and what we were saying. I rather enjoyed this lesson and here's why:

When I was reading *Twelfth Night* before leaving for London, I came across these lines of Olivia's:

If you be mad, be gone; if you
have reason, be brief: 'tis not that time of moon
with me to make one in so skipping a dialogue. (1.5.198-200)

I read this line and I thought, "I see what you're doing, Shakespeare; is that supposed to be a subtle period reference?" Being a curious student, I Googled it. Every website I looked at said something along the lines of it being nighttime, or too late in the evening, that it was an inconvenient time for guests to visit. I didn't buy into those interpretations, but I also thought I might have been reading too much into the line. So, we got our lines assigned for our *Twelfth Night* scenes and this subtle period reference line was mine. This was my chance to figure out how valid my interpretation was. I asked Jo if my loose translation of, "I'm PMS-ing and could slap someone right now" was justifiable. She told me it absolutely was justifiable, and I was excited to use even more sass now. It was a little victory, but I felt validated in my ability to interpret Shakespeare. After our class, during yet another round of reflection on what I learned, I wrote, "I feel like I get it. Today it was like everything clicked and became real and I can feel things coming together. It's a beautiful art form."

But perhaps the most surreal moment of my Shakespeare school experience was the morning we got to stand on the Globe stage. We arrived at the stage door at eight in the morning, ready for one hour of time in what I'm going to deem a sacred theatrical space. Jo told us that the theater opened in 1997 and the architects believed it was important to use only materials that would have been available in Shakespeare's time. She said that the wood absorbs every vibration, so every footstep and every line spoken gets preserved in that space forever. When we arrived, Jo told us to pick an entrance spot and when we walked out onto the stage to shout our name. We followed her instructions



If my high school self only knew she'd be standing on the Globe stage.

and she announced, "Congratulations, everyone. Your voices and steps are now forever a part of the Globe Theatre." How amazing is that? I cried a little. Jo let us stay longer than the hour we were given to take pictures, and we stayed right up until the stage manager kicked us out, so the crew could get set up for the matinee performance.



The Shakespeare's Globe Education Program 2017.

We rehearsed our scenes on the stage where we saw the professional actors perform them a week before. We quite literally ran across the stage to fill the space and it was exhilarating. Everywhere we stood, we could be seen by a hypothetical audience member. I could understand why it felt like the actors were constantly running all over the place like

they had an espresso shot before their scene. Granted, running across the Globe stage is a little more difficult with seventeen people running around while trying to connect with their individual scene partners without colliding into someone else or falling off the stage. It was kind of daunting to be so privileged to speak Shakespeare's words on that stage. Was I even qualified to do that? So many great actors have come before me to run across the same stage and we all shared a connection of having parts of ourselves saved in the theater. I wrote in my travel journal:

Something I really haven't thought much about is how Shakespeare kept the space of the Globe in mind when writing his plays. Like I know that he would think about his intended audience (I mean duh, pretty sure all authors do that) and then we mentioned how he wrote to his actors' strengths. But I mean, the space itself. That never occurred to me, probably because back in NYC theatre you're lucky to book a theatre at all let alone have your own and design your work around it.

I mean, if I had a theater like the Globe to write for, I'd sure consider the space when crafting my plays. I also think the types of performance spaces in which we perform Shakespeare change the essence of the story in ways he likely didn't anticipate. Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed in the Globe, and today we can see Shakespeare performed in the round with the actors being visible from all directions or on the typical proscenium stage where the audience can only view the actors from one direction. Part of the reason I think Shakespeare's work remains popular, whether this was a deliberate choice or not on his part, is that he designed plays that are versatile in performance, so we can manipulate the space, the designs, even the text itself to share new interpretations of his work.

As promised, Jo had us revisit the concept of power struggles within character dynamics and work with status during our next class. We practiced working with status by playing a game in which Jo handed us each a playing card with low numbers indicating low status and the same went for high numbers and high status. We were supposed to enter our rehearsal space as a character whose status aligned with our card. Our character's status affected our presence, how we interacted with others, and if we felt like we belonged. For example, my character was of a lower status, so I walked into the room without making eye contact or initiating conversation with anyone. I decided that my character didn't feel as though she belonged there, so I sat on the floor by a trash can with my hair covering my face. While doing this, we were also supposed to observe how everyone else interacted on their own, and with others, so that after a few minutes we could line up in order of the lowest status to the highest without talking or showing anyone our cards.

As I reflected on this exercise in my travel journal, I thought that this lower card coincided with what I was actually doing. I was worrying that I wasn't as good as everyone else, that I couldn't compete with them. And I was fully aware that this was not a competition. I wanted other people to believe I was good at performing, but mostly I wished that I could wholeheartedly believe it. It was challenging to think of myself as Olivia, who has high status and owns the room. In a way, I guess, it was good that I played her because it forced me to put myself out there, even when I wasn't taking the extra step to put myself out there offstage. I love performing. I love it so much and I just want to do it well. It's like I owe it to the art.

In our later rehearsals we played an acting game which Jo referred to as "Playing the Plate." The way this game works is two or more people pretend they are standing on a giant plate and they need to keep their weight distributed to keep the plate balanced. As one person speaks

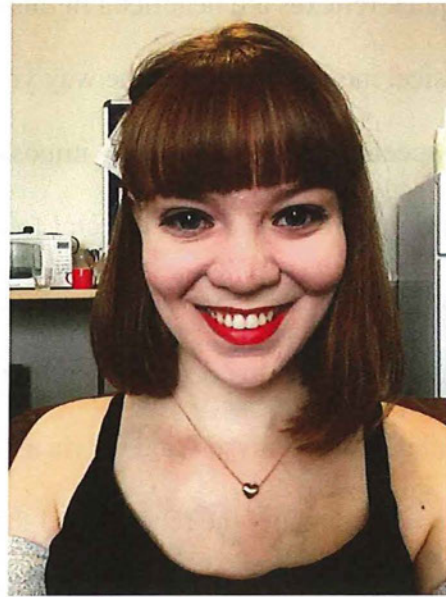
their lines, they walk around, and the other person has to mirror their actions. And the speaker doesn't have to walk in a straight path: they can take off running, zig-zag, change directions, etc., so quick reflexes are beneficial in this game. The point of the exercise is to see how your physical movements affect the way you play the scene. Walking and talking in any direction, at any speed, seemed to be nearly impossible for me. I was focusing on walking and in the process of trying to remember my speech I forgot it again. Prior to this experience, I'd never been a movement-oriented actress. As I circled Elizabeth, walking wherever I felt and whenever I wanted, without anyone directly telling me how I should do it, I felt empowered. I saw the parallel between myself and Olivia as we took hold of our agency and got things accomplished.

Throughout the rehearsals, I thought about Olivia's thoughts and the stream of consciousness nature of it. I questioned what she was doing when her thoughts changed and why her train of thought shifted. I thought her defensiveness of sass broke down to a vulnerability she isn't ready to show. As the scene progresses she lets Viola/Cesario, in and shares her thoughts. But Olivia keeps her sass to remain discreet while still being blunt enough to throw Viola off. Viola and Olivia interact in a linguistic game of ping pong, seeing who can out sass the other. That I could handle no matter how freaked out my perfectionist self was.

As we neared our performance, I gained more self-confidence and affirmation. Jo told me she liked that I made the choice to talk to the audience when I gave the PMS lines. I guess I found my ownership over the lines. Maybe it was the fact that I wore a black veil for half the scene and I assumed people couldn't see me, but I felt free to play with the scene. Then I felt I was truly Performing Shakespeare. The young women in our group were on the same mental Shakespearean plane and worked in sync to transition actresses. Since we trusted each other, we

were able to simply play without being preoccupied wondering if someone was going to miss their cue, for example.

The day of our performance was the first time we ran through the whole show. Prior to the performance, we had only been working on our individual scenes and recently worked out transitions from scene to scene. For being such a high maintenance person, especially in a theatrical setting, I'm amazed that I wasn't more on edge. Maybe it was because our audience barely outnumbered the cast. My main takeaway from this rehearsal was recognizing that this is as good as it's going to get within the next couple of hours, so I might as well just sell it.



A pre-performance selfie in my costume.

I remember us standing in a circle, holding hands, before we let the audience in. We convened as a company to think good thoughts before performing Shakespeare in London. We used to do something similar when I was in high school where the whole cast held hands, with their right crossed over their left. We would close our eyes and our directors would give us positive affirmations about that evening's performance, how hard we worked, and how proud they were of us. One person would squeeze the hand of the person on their left, beginning a chain reaction until it passed back to the original person. Then we would spin out and get ready for places. I hadn't gotten to perform since my high school production of *Into the Woods*, and greatly missed the thrill of live theatre. As we stood in this circle in England, it brought me back to being fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen years old and being so excited and

happy I could cry. I realized how long it had been since I got to stand in a pre-show circle and I missed it.

Jo told us we were ready and that we knew the text, so our only job was to go tell the story. I believe we told the story, albeit a much shorter version of the story, but we took that small audience on a journey with us to get the crash course in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The performance was just as thrilling as I expected. Hearing the laughs allowed me to feel free to play because the audience was responsive. I remembered my lines, even the long list of reasons why Olivia doesn't want to marry Orsino. And the highlight of my day was yelling at Hayley, who played Malvolio, to bring Cesario back. We did our bows in the style of the Globe,



The cast of *Twelfth Night*.

even though we were performing in the rehearsal room, bowing to the front, the side, the other side, and the front again. In that moment I realized, "Wow, we actually did it. We performed Shakespeare after less than three weeks of rehearsal time." I can forever say that I performed Shakespeare at the Globe.

The Great British Bucket List

Since we had class for only a few hours a day, and had three-day weekends, I had lots of spare time to go out and explore London. I spent most of my free time with my friend and scene partner, Elizabeth. We would fill our days with adventures from breakfast through dinner, until it was time for the evening's play or musical. As was the case with most of my travel companions, Elizabeth helped me learn more about myself as a traveler as we experienced different facets of London. She became the British counterpart for my friend Leah in Italy in that we were also quite good at exploring museums.

One day, June 18, 2017, we fit in four whole museums, which was more exhausting than it sounds. When I was researching places to visit in London, the British Library was at the top of my list. Just the name sounds like a booklover's paradise, especially for a self-proclaimed Brit lit fanatic. The British Library is part museum and part actual library, where people go to research. I saw multiple historical documents that changed my life. I didn't realize that I would be looking at Da Vinci's notebooks or original compositions from Bach, Mozart, and Puccini. Or Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* and Shakespeare's sonnets. This exhibit is also a testimony to British history with a letter from Queen Victoria, the first King James Bible, and one of the four surviving Magna Cartas, along with the Pope's annulment of the Magna Carta. The British Library has a Gutenberg Bible and a *Beowulf* manuscript. But what made me start to cry in the middle of the exhibit was the unfinished Jane Austen story. The realization that she wrote in that book, she touched it and held it in her hand, and I was inches away from it, separated only by glass, brought me closer to her. I told Elizabeth that I would be there awhile, so feel free to move on without me and see some other manuscripts.

It was like a literary awakening. There's so much access now to Austen's and George Eliot's and the Brontë sisters' work that I forget they all started out handwriting these drafts. Maybe what I liked so much about seeing these manuscripts is that these writers had to start out in the same place that I did, except I now have the luxury of being able to type much faster than one can write by hand. But I was handwriting my travel journal at the time, so we all really were connected in that sense. I held my journal and wrote in it just as Jane Austen did. Maybe if I kept doing that I could write with her skill and, hopefully, her wit. I always enjoy going to the library, but this was especially inspirational.

During the day of four museums, Elizabeth and I also visited the National Gallery, per our friend Kaelyn's suggestion, because she told us it was awesome. Also, I'd like to thank London for making their museums free. I didn't realize how many famous artists had their work in this building. The National Gallery alone had Caravaggio, Monet, Manet, Degas, Seurat, Renoir, Botticelli, van Eyck, and van Gogh. It looked as though my art book from my humanities class threw up over this place. If I wasn't in love with England yet, I was now. I got to be in the presence of the greatest art and it filled me with joy.

Before we get too wrapped up in the joy, I have a few thoughts about museums that are a little less joyous. Why are there always far too many people there that are in the way of the thing you want to see? I swear half the time I was just waiting for people to move. It becomes more difficult to stand there and admire the work when you're surrounded by other tourists who are usually sweaty (why are they always sweaty?) who just want to take a picture and move on and may not even realize why this art is so famous and draws these crowds in the first place. You don't even want to get me started about how much the photography bothers me. You cannot truly experience the art, the museum, or life itself if you're living through your cell phone. There, I

said it. No one else will, but I'm not afraid to make such a provocative statement. Because I'm an independent adult now. And as an adult, I'm telling you all to put down the camera and try actually looking at something and giving it more than two seconds of thought before clicking the camera button.

My favorite part of the National Gallery was van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, which was also why Kaelyn recommended we visit. Since I was better equipped to be an informed art appreciator, I felt like I was Julia Roberts as Katherine Watson in *Mona Lisa Smile*. If it seems to you at this point that I just compare every moment in my life to



something from a movie, TV show, or piece of theatre, then you're exactly right. I wrote a research paper about van Gogh before viewing *Sunflowers* partially because of the scene in *Mona Lisa Smile* where they do the van Gogh by numbers project and partially because I did that project for one of my French classes. I had to research the painting and the artist and give a presentation in French with a visual representation of the art. I consider myself to be a terrible painter, so I went with the paint by numbers route. It turned out well and I hung it up in my dorm at college.

The actual painting was much bigger than I anticipated. Again, the opposite of my experience seeing the *Mona Lisa* in high school. I was now that person lingering too long in the pack of tourists, staring at the painting, but I didn't care. This painting is one of the exceptions for me; I get jazzed about this painting and that's not a normal occurrence. I was so close I could see the texture and the spots where there were small globs of paint. Now there's a painting I

would've liked to touch. But alas, I have a great respect for art and I restrained myself. I did what Katherine Watson would do and I considered the painting and formed my own opinions. I decided that I liked that some of the flowers were wilting and that van Gogh used darker shades of yellow for the petals, rather than a typical bright gold. I thought about how he didn't try to make an idealized painting of flowers in a vase and I liked that because it felt a more authentic representation, not only of flowers but of life. After doing what Katherine Watson would do, I did what I typically do, which was to nearly cry because of a painting,

And now, for the last new item on my London bucket list: finding Fleet Street. This was another adventure Elizabeth and I embarked on to live out our shared love of musical theatre. We both loved Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, which conveniently takes place in London. We just needed to find the street sign, so we could say we trod the path of Sweeney Todd. Not only did we find the street sign, but right before we were about to turn around to leave I saw a barber shop with the label, "The Demon Barber of Fleet Street." It was real! We ran across the street to go look at it. It did not disappoint. It was kind of spooky because you had to go downstairs to get



I trod the path of Sweeney Todd.

to the barber shop and the wall over the stairs was a mural painted of the scary barber chair Sweeney Todd has his victims sit in before slitting their throats and dumping their bodies down the chute into the cellar. There was no meat pie shop next to it, but I'll take what I can get. At least we were more likely to be able to rule out acts of cannibalism happening in this barber shop, but we didn't actually go inside to find out. There are just some questions that you don't want answers to.

Exploring London on my own like this was exactly what my high school self hoped for. I knew, in theory, that I had the freedom to go anywhere I wanted whenever I wanted when I was at home. But something in my mind would hold me back from taking that invitation seriously. At seventeen and nineteen I questioned my capability to hold my own as an adult in any setting, let alone a foreign country. Since I knew that I was not going to be back in Europe any time soon, I pushed myself to exercise my freedom as an adult. When I was twenty, I began to develop a greater understanding that travel was not just a fun expensive hobby, rather it also taught me that I am in control. I didn't have to ask anyone to hand me the keys, so I could sit in this metaphorical driver's seat. I am an adult who can efficiently travel overseas and make decisions. I am an adult who can think critically about what she sees in museums and make connections to the city with settings of popular musicals. I am also an adult who knows that none of these are fixed skills; I will continue to improve them as I encounter new challenges.



Speak the Speech

Throughout my undergraduate experience, as I've been appreciating the art of storytelling and strengthening my analytical skills and interpretations, I've learned about how we manipulate the English language for our stories. In our text classes with Emily, she taught us about the construction of Shakespeare's prose and verse, and I can finally say that someone taught me iambic pentameter. For an English major, I had a very limited background in poetry. I did know that iambic pentameter is supposed to be easier to speak because we naturally speak about ten syllables before breathing anyway, so Shakespeare decided that would be convenient for the actors.

I learned that an iamb is the pattern of unstressed and stressed syllables. That took far too long to figure out. I also never knew there was such a thing as a masculine or feminine ending to a line. A masculine ending ends on a stressed syllable, whereas a feminine ending ends on an unstressed syllable. I connected with what Emily said about rhyme, "There's something about rhyme that makes it seem like it must be true." It made sense to me that rhymes are easier to remember, therefore when characters try to convince themselves or others of something they can do so in rhyme and the audience, and the character, is more likely to hold onto that statement. Thus, it becomes even more important for actors to understand what they are saying, how they're saying it impacts the plot, and why their character says those lines.

Emily showed us the rhetorical and dramatic significance of Shakespeare's text and said, "That's why Shakespeare is weird; he's trying to be human." Shakespeare's writing shouldn't be inaccessible to us because even though the world has changed drastically in the past four hundred years, the human condition hasn't. On some level, everyone can relate to being a teenager and wanting independence, but thinking their parents don't understand them, like

Romeo and Juliet (though, probably not on the same level of a hidden relationship due to a long family feud that ends with multiple deaths). We can relate to Viola's desire to find her lost brother, Sebastian, and Olivia's desire to be an independent woman without being pressured to marry someone she doesn't love. I don't think we still read, perform, and teach Shakespeare because he wrote a lot of poetry and plays or because his language seems fancier than that of the 21st century; I think we still read, perform, and teach Shakespeare because of his representation of humanity.

And yes, at the Globe I remember Emily saying that Shakespeare doesn't care about us doing literary analysis of his work, because it was designed to be seen and heard, not read. Her exact words were, "Shakespeare doesn't give a shit about grammatical English writing." As a teacher, I struggle with this one. Since I'm a firm believer that we should study Shakespeare from a literary and theatrical perspective, I think our knowledge of the poetry helps us understand what the character's actions are, and our understanding of the character's actions helps us understand what the Elizabethan language means. I gain a better understanding Shakespeare's representation of humanity by mixing the literature and theatre facets of his work. I also understand that part of the beauty of Shakespeare is that we have the option to separate the literary and theatrical perspectives and his work still holds up as part of the classics.

During our second text class with Emily, I had planned on sitting and listening as others asked their questions about *Twelfth Night*. I didn't think I had anything that I needed further clarification on. I was feeling pretty good after our class with Jo, when I discovered my interpretation of the PMS speech was correct. My plan to simply observe during class did not happen. While Emily was in the process of trying to answer another student's question, she needed an example from the text to help demonstrate her point about punctuation, "Commas are

rubbish. Screw them.” Zoe gave her the beginning lines of a speech I gave which was basically just a long list about why Olivia doesn’t want to marry Orsino.

“Are those your lines?”

I interjected with, “No, they’re mine.”

“Good. Stand up and do it.”

In that moment I could feel my pulse quickening and I was definitely going to stress sweat through my T-shirt. Again, I’m someone who likes a plan and being put on the spot caught me off guard, especially because of the self-diagnosed imposter syndrome making me feel mildly insecure about my performance. But I wasn’t going to shy away from something just because it might have scared me. As I walked up to the front of the room I just kept thinking “Dammit, Zoe” and repeated that until Emily gave me directions.

I had to read through the speech in front of everyone, and you would think that a former theatre major, who has taken acting classes before wouldn’t be so insecure or worried that her voice sounded weird. I guess being on display made me worry about potentially failing miserably and having witnesses to remember it. Side note: when I signed up for this experience, I didn’t think all these insecurities would pop up. I didn’t think I had these insecurities, or at least I didn’t think they were going to be so prominent. I tried the exercise of reading the text aloud while walking and changing direction each time I came to a punctuation mark. That felt like I was just running in circles and didn’t seem right. I must have looked really confused as I tried to execute the fine art of walking while talking. There was one point when Emily said, “You look scared” and in a tiny voice I said, “no.” I then turned to my friends and said, “That’s a lie.”

If I felt like I was humiliating myself, I felt much better when Emily affirmed my interpretation of Olivia’s line, “He might have took his answer long ago” (1.5.261) to mean that

Olivia has already told him “no” so many times that you’d think he would get the picture by now. Emily’s face lit up and she told me, “That’s good! I really like that!” I put the knowledge of Stanislavski’s acting techniques from my acting class to use in that moment. Konstantin Stanislavski advocated that actors access their past experiences to channel into their performance to make it more authentic. I accessed my past experience of that time this kid Jimmy tried to get me to go to the seventh grade dance with him and didn’t seem to understand that when I said, “no thank you,” I meant that I wasn’t interested. Finally, one of those awkward middle school memories came in handy, as I’m sure it did for Shakespeare’s contemporaries.

Each time I finished reading, Emily told me it was lovely. Maybe she could tell that I needed some validation and that I was like Bambi trying to walk on ice at that moment, literally and figuratively. After I finished going through my speech, while simultaneously working through this newfound performance anxiety coupled with my preexisting perfectionism, I was free to observe the rest of class as planned. As intense as I may have made this experience seem, I did come out stronger and I’m glad I was brave enough to recite Shakespeare while walking in circles in front of my class.

Later that day, Zoe did tell me, “I am so sorry for like throwing you under the bus during Text by bringing up your speech. I thought we’d just analyze it there like we did with the others. I didn’t think she’d make you get up and do it.” While I was thinking, “Dammit, Zoe” at the time, after class I realized that it was good for me that Zoe accidentally threw me under the bus. If she didn’t do that, then Emily wouldn’t have made me run through my speech in front of the class. And I certainly wasn’t planning on volunteering to put myself out there because I was feeling shy and insecure. My fourteen-year-old self who fell in love with Shakespeare hoped she’d be able to make informed interpretations of his work, but I don’t remember if I thought I’d ever get

to this metaphorical place as a scholar or even literally get to the Globe. I wish that I'd been more confident to put myself out there and ask more questions while I was in London. In my head I knew that I should be doing that but being in a new place with new people can be daunting. Hearing my teachers at the Globe, these Shakespeare experts, praise my work has had a long-lasting effect on my confidence as a scholar. My time at the Globe showed me that I had the tools I needed to form valid interpretations of some of the most acclaimed works in western literature, and now I have that foundation to build on as I continue to study and perform Shakespeare.

Ms. Robben Said She Would Buy The Flowers Herself

While I was in London, I mapped out a literary endeavor to walk through Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. I first read the book in my Honors humanities class. I remember liking it then, even after having read it while half asleep because I was probably preoccupied with group projects or midterms. I remember thinking it was well-written and liking the fact that it made the everyday life noteworthy. My friends and I liked it so much we used it for a final project, so I'm pretty much bound to this book forever. One year after we read it, I knew I wanted to read the novel again because it took place in London and I wanted to see what Woolf's characters saw. I just wanted to vicariously live through Mrs. Dalloway, but without having to go through the trouble of planning a party.

When I reread the book, I was moved so much more and instantly fell in love with it again. I loved how Mrs. Dalloway and her daughter Elizabeth were different examples of independent women at the time, and I was all about being an independent young woman. The stream of consciousness writing style resonated with me, as you may have picked up on by this point in the memoir. I let Virginia Woolf be my guide and followed her characters through London.

It was easy enough to hear the bells at Big Ben when our group stopped by on our scenic tour of London. Alas, each time the bells rang, the perspectives of my inner thoughts did not shift. If only. Instead I had to settle for me thinking about thinking. Then, I thought about Virginia Woolf's voice and how shocked I was to be able to hear it, for one thing, and how much deeper it was than I anticipated. This transitioned into thinking about *The Hours*, the novel that's a retelling of *Mrs. Dalloway* in three different storylines and how fantastic I thought that book was. In one day, I listened to bells, had stream of consciousness thoughts, and thought about

Virginia Woolf. That's not so different from an average day at college but being in London made it cooler.

The most notable location that I wanted to see, that I had to find on my own, was Regent's Park. I went with Elizabeth (my friend, not the queen, and not the fictional character—there are too many Elizabeths to keep track of). We got there by the Tube without any problem; the trouble usually came from trying to find the place on foot once we left the station. Regardless of the struggle, we eventually found it, like always, because we made such a good team. On our way to finding the park, we passed this cream-colored house with a yellow undertone. It was a fancy building because it had pillars and I think it would've been Mrs. Dalloway's house. I'm not sure what it's used for now, but once upon a time it was probably a someone's fancy house where they liked to throw parties. In my head it will be known as the Dalloway house and it will be what I envision each time I read the book from now on.

We walked through the park and through the Avenue Garden and Queen Mary's Garden. It's a good thing that flowers are so prevalent in this novel because they were everywhere. I'm sure Virginia Woolf knew that and kept it in mind as she was writing. If I had forgotten that I was a literature nerd, I remembered it when I saw a park bench and imagined Septimus sitting there feeding the pigeons. It was almost too easy to picture myself in this book. There were people walking, reading on the benches, sitting by the fountain, sketching flowers. Such an idyllic sight. I could have easily walked through this park and drifted off into a daydream about my past. All I needed was to buy



Casually sitting on a bench in Regent's Park.

the flowers myself and I would've become an independent Mrs. Dalloway, minus the party, being middle-aged, being part of the bad marriage, having the grown-up daughter, and all the questioning about her relationships with Peter and Sally.

That afternoon when we left that part of the city to head to the Globe, Elizabeth needed to go somewhere different. Rather than go with her and sit through a meeting that didn't pertain to me, I decided to ride the Tube by myself to the Globe. I tried to reassure myself that I could do this by thinking, "If Elizabeth Dalloway can take the bus by herself, I can take the Tube by myself. People in this city travel alone all the time, why does it have to be different for me? I go places by myself all the time at home." That was before we actually got on the Tube. Here are the actual notes I wrote while on the Tube alone:

Elizabeth went to her meeting and I am now on the Tube by myself. Wow look who is a big girl now. I'm going to ride down to Mansion House and walk to the Globe. My heart is racing and I'm kind of scared, but it's going to be all right. The train is stopped for some reason not at a station and I don't know why, and I want it to go and I-- thank goodness it's moving. If my parents knew what I did they would absolutely flip out. Update: I made it off at Mansion House just fine and found the Globe and chilled in Starbucks until it was time for class.

This was an important, unplanned moment for me because everyone had said to me before I left that I shouldn't go out on my own. For the first half of the trip I didn't go anywhere by myself. This group of travelers had a different attitude toward going out by oneself than we did in Italy. In Italy, we had at least one other buddy and people were always had formed groups, so no one had to go off alone to do something they wanted. I wished in England that more people were forming groups like that. This time we had the added potential of terrorism, so traveling in

groups was a really, really good idea this time around. I wished that I wasn't so scared to go alone. Everyone else was wandering off on their own and it baffled me. I'd just be thinking, "Whoa, whoa, whoa what do you think you're doing? Do you know what you're doing?" I also think it's more fun to go somewhere with someone else. That way you have someone to talk to and you're not just sitting on the Tube for 45 minutes doing nothing. It was kind of exhilarating and a little scary to go by myself, although I was probably unnecessarily scared. It's like the scene in the movie where the girl moves to the city and has to go out on her own to get that job or apartment or find friends.

I got through this moment of fear by simply sucking it up and telling myself that even if there were a crisis, my panicking wouldn't do anything. The rational part of my brain knew that I didn't need to be worried, but the irrational part of my brain made quite a compelling case as to why I should be. I was underground at the mercy of London's public transportation system; there wasn't much else I could do. There isn't even cell service because the Tube is underground, so it's not like I could have called or texted someone else to help me calm down. Perhaps I could've struck up a conversation with the person next to me. All I did was focus my energy on breathing and staying as calm as possible. Once I realized that I'd made it past this nonexistent obstacle, everything was fine. I think Virginia Woolf would have been proud of me, and that's good enough.

Later in the trip, Zi and I took a day trip to Bath and we got on the bus at Victoria. Elizabeth Dalloway gets on the bus at Victoria. I didn't even plan that one. I took that coincidence as a sign that having Virginia Woolf as my guide was working out for me, like she was watching over me, helping me follow her book to learn how to become an independent woman abroad.

Perhaps the most significant *Mrs. Dalloway* experience I had was at a convenience store less than a block away from where we lived. I went in to buy the flowers myself. I left with five red roses and some bottles of water. I have no clue what flowers Clarissa Dalloway actually gets, but her husband Richard brings her roses even though by that point in the novel we've spent chapters' worth of time explaining that she doesn't need anyone to bring her the flowers. But it was still a nice gesture, though. The point is that I didn't need anyone to bring me the flowers, either. Literally or figuratively speaking, I like to be able to accomplish things on my own.

When I got back to our room I realized that I had nowhere to put these flowers. Being the creative person I am, I took an empty one-liter water bottle and fashioned it into a vase using



only a pair of tweezers and my bare hands. That was probably more impressive than buying the flowers or riding the Tube alone.

I sat them by our window until the day we moved out. And fortunately for us, the part in *Mrs. Dalloway* where Septimus jumps out his window didn't happen. This narrative would've gotten dark very fast. Since I was the author of my *Mrs. Dalloway* experience, I got to pick and choose the best parts of the story to

Ms. Robben got the flowers herself.

live through. I could've gotten the flowers myself in Indiana, but again, the fact that I was in another country and that the country was the setting of the novel made it more special.

The Show Must Go On

As we went through the sites of London, I thought a lot about my friends from home. I told my roommate, Zi, stories about them and she told me I was so lucky to have friends like that. I realized that the people often make the experience, like they did when I was in my first Honors class or when we went to Italy. Then I started to miss those experiences even more and wondered what I did to deserve something so wonderful. I wrote postcards to my best friends, Brittany, Debbie, and Leah, and told them how I couldn't wait to see them again. Then I got to wondering if this would be my last study abroad or even my last trip abroad. At that point I stopped writing the day's travel journal because I didn't want to get sucked into that vortex. But a few days later, I came back and was getting retrospective about what our guide at the Tower of London said about only remembering the good times.

I was thinking about how my time in London was one third of the way over at that point and that my time in Europe (at least for that trip) was one fourth over. That led to me thinking about how fast time races forward and how I was suddenly going into my third year of college. I wrote in my travel journal,

Part of me wishes I could go back to the start, but I'm remembering a rose-colored, romanticized history. Two majors and integrated Honors was *hard*. I was wishing I could skip ahead to this part, even though I knew I'd regret that and tried to savor every moment (even when I felt lonely and was frightened by change and sitting in my dorm room drowning in work and missing home and everything familiar, wanting the movie college experience with my close friends). I'm already thinking about wanting to tell everyone my stories but make sure you

stop to enjoy the place while you're here. I'm also wondering how I'll tackle my reading list when I get back and how to go about writing my thesis.

To clarify, the passage from my travel journal contained internal screaming that stemmed from a state of overwhelming confusion. It was funny for me to reread that months after being back from Europe and actually getting to work on my thesis. Sometimes I still think those things a lot. During my first year of college, I remember wanting to skip the difficult parts and go straight to being a smart capable adult with great friends. At the same time, I knew that if I skipped to the end I wouldn't get to experience the chapters in between. I had to teach myself that I couldn't have both. I thought that a lot freshman year, but that was partly because my experience was not quite what I anticipated, and it was an uphill battle. I thought that four years would take forever to go by and I would be struggling to survive, let alone thrive. And as I write this now, it's weird to think about how fast those years of college went and how impossible it seems to me that I've been abroad three times and gotten to learn more than I thought possible. So much of my late adolescence and early adulthood feels like it's unreal that I could be so lucky to have these great things happen to me.

And then something happened in England that I wished wasn't real. I was visiting London during a time where frequent terrorist attacks were occurring. On June 19, 2017, I woke up to a text from my dad at 3:14 a.m., U.K. time, that they heard the news about the terrorist attack outside a mosque in London, which happened at about 12:20 a.m. U.K. time. This was another incident of people running civilians over in the street. This was the first I heard of this event because I'd been in my room asleep the whole time. I texted back that I was safe and sleeping and then proceeded to spend the next thirty minutes lying there wide awake, envisioning every possible scenario in which I would meet with an untimely death. I came to realize that's

not the best way to drift back to sleep. I was planning on going to theaters by myself and now was terrified of making that journey, at night no less. I wrote that, "What really sucks is that I was just getting comfortable with the city and getting around and now it's like that's been taken away from me and I'm at square negative one." When I woke up for the day a little after nine, I messaged everyone at home to let them know I was all right and fortunately everyone from our group was also safe and nowhere near the attack. As usual, when I felt scared, I emailed Ms. Dalton about what was going on and that I was fine. She was right, I did pick an interesting summer to visit London. When you put it that way it sounds like I planned this out because I knew this would happen.

When I visited England in high school, I told myself that if I ever returned to London I would see *Les Misérables* and *The Phantom of the Opera* because that's where they began. All those nights watching the 25th anniversary performances of those shows in high school left me longing not only to see the shows in person, but in the theaters where they came to life back in the late eighties and altered the course of modern musical theatre. At the very least, they became staples for theatre students across America, who pretended to climb the barricade or haunt an opera house after school at their drama club rehearsals. Or was that just me?

Determined to make this dream a reality, I got up one morning, prior to June 19, and booked myself tickets to see both shows. I would make these trips solo, so not only was I fulfilling an adolescent dream, but I was taking another stride at young adult independence. I would have to get on the Tube alone and get myself to and from the theaters. How ballsy. I wrote in my travel journal after clicking "buy now," and enjoying the fact that in the U.K. ticket prices are capped, so I have more opportunities to see as much theatre as time will allow: "I'm really

excited and really scared about going alone. If my parents, grandparents, or friends knew about this they'd flip. I'll mention it afterwards, perhaps."

I saw *Les Mis* first. I hadn't seen it since I was fifteen years old, and it was the night before my algebra II final. I did not do so well on that final. To be fair, math was not my strong suit, so I probably was not going to do much better had I not spent three hours in 19th century France. I didn't remember much about the live show, so I was excited to see how the show would look through my older, grown-up eyes that weren't preoccupied with the thought of having to take an algebra final the next day. I wrote in my travel journal:

I was a brave girl and put myself on the Tube and even changed lines. I was a little hesitant then, hoping the second train would go in the direction I wanted. Thankfully it did; I read the sign correctly. Then on the second train it started moving and a man with a suitcase wasn't ready for it and nearly fell on his face. It wasn't as horrific as I thought finding the theater. I swear, no online maps are actually accurate. It was less than ten minutes away and I felt confident I could retrace my steps back.

I knew seeing this show would play with my emotions, but that still didn't prepare me for the emotional rollercoaster I got strapped into. Again, seeing this show five years later brought more perspective and a greater understanding of the reality of these characters' situations. While the show is fictional, these situations are not necessarily fictional, and we can still see them today. The actress who played Fantine, the character who has to give up her illegitimate daughter and resort to prostitution before dying a painful death, had my heart. She made



An adventure three years in the making.

me cry out of frustration for her. That was the face of desperation. No one believes Fantine or even listens to her and it broke my heart. The most devastating part is that Fantine gets left on the street, helpless, only wanting to save her daughter's life.

To make matters worse, the people next to me kept laughing. They also talked a lot throughout the show, which was very annoying as I was trying not to be distracted from the world of the show. Maybe they were laughing at their own conversation, but from my perspective it looked as though they found this show humorous. It's not a comedy. "Miserable" is literally in the title. So, I sat there thinking, "What's wrong with you? She's lost her job, her child is dying, she has to become a prostitute, she nearly goes to jail, and dies in the next song." I didn't find any of those scenes funny, not even when she sneezed on Jean Valjean because she was dying from pneumonia or tuberculosis or a host of other things because as I understood it, 19th century French prostitutes didn't have the greatest healthcare. Pair all of that with some gorgeous music and it was a moving evening at the theater that enriched my life.

When the time came to find my way back after dark, I will admit that I started to worry about whether I missed the last train because this show is so long (I didn't) or what if I got lost trying to find the station. I didn't know what I'd do, other than panic. In reality, I found the Tube station within five minutes of leaving the theater and found the line I needed without any trouble. While I was speed walking from the Gloucester Road station back to my room, I texted my sister all about my night because she also loves *Les Mis*. I also wanted a distraction from all the warnings people had given me over the years about never walking anywhere alone, especially after dark, because I'd get captured. I needed to calm my nerves, so naturally I chose to do so by making my sister jealous about how great the show was. I'm such a nice sister. I made it back to my dorm alive and unharmed and knew that I could manage the same thing the next night to see

Phantom. If the other women could make it home after a night of heavy drinking and clubbing, why shouldn't I have been able to make it back from the theater sober?

When I had to get myself to *Phantom*, I wrote, "I was more confident taking the Tube down there and I found the building even easier than I found the Queen's Theatre. And this time



It was this sight that brought my high school self to tears in 2014 and made my college self smile in 2017.

I wasn't afraid!" This elated feeling continued as I watched the performance. I wrote in my journal that the theater was so gorgeous, it felt like I was in an old opera house, which was of course very fitting. I also said, "Again, my seventeen-year-old self is so happy. You haven't seen the show until you've seen it in London where the magic began 30 years ago." With this show and *Les Mis*, the music was so meant to be heard live

rather than on a recording; I was hearing instruments that I'd missed the first few thousand times I listened to the CD. Once

again, I had unclear memories of the production I saw in the U.S. I was also in a different headspace at twenty than at seventeen. Throughout my time watching theatre in London, I kept picking up on new things from stories I thought I knew inside and out. I wonder if Andrew Lloyd Webber ever watches the show and finds something he's never noticed in the past thirty years, even as the writer?

This Phantom showed so much humility, and his humanity showed through as he cried. He *cried*. This got me to sympathize even more with the character we often think of as the villain, but is he? This actor's portrayal prompted me to ask even more unanswerable questions about this show I like so much. At one point he whispers to Christine, the woman he kidnaps a couple of times because he's obsessed with her voice, "I'm so sorry." I'd never heard that before.

Maybe something went wrong in the show and he was apologizing to the actress for something, but I choose to think it was an acting choice. This was the best production I saw in the West End. I felt connected to the characters and each production element worked seamlessly together, like there was a supernatural phantom causing it all to work.

Continuing the saga of people behaving poorly in the theater, the people in front of me came in late and then were reprimanded three separate times for using their phones to try to take pictures of the performance. 1. That's prohibited by law. 2. It's distracting. PSA to everyone going to any sort of theatrical performance: Put. Your. Phones. Away. Thank you. I figured that since this was Europe, and Europe is supposedly more sophisticated than the U.S., that people would have behaved better. It was kind of appalling, honestly. As I texted my sister again on my way home, I mentioned that the people sitting in the row next to me wanted to sing along during "The Music of the Night." She immediately fired back, "No. We don't do that."

Poor theatre etiquette aside, both musicals brought my London experience full circle. I didn't let any of my fears about traveling alone stop me from living my life and accomplishing my seventeen-year-old self's goals. I don't remember being scared at all about traveling alone when I was seventeen thinking of this hypothetical scenario. But that was probably because I knew it would be years before it happened, and I thought I'd be more skilled as a human in general that it wouldn't be a big deal. Simply taking those short walks and taking the Tube alone, just like everyday Londoners do, made me feel like a part of the city. And I felt like a grown-up. Now I know that if I return to London, I can navigate and travel on my own again and maybe even help someone else find their way.

All London's A Stage

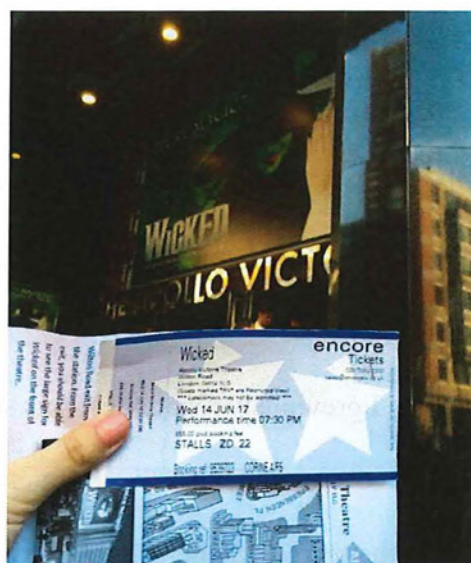
My seventeen-year-old self made herself a promise that if she made it back to London one day, she would soak up as much theatre as she could in this epicenter of the arts. When my twenty-year-old self was preparing for this trip, she planned to fulfill that promise and hit up the musical theatre scene. Even though I was older, wiser, etc., I was, and still am, that Broadway fangirl blaring the *Wicked* soundtrack in the car on her drive home from college or lip syncing along with Sutton Foster as I get ready in the morning to pump myself up for the day. And I was finally in a group of people who also had a passion for musical theatre, so it wouldn't look weird that my iPod only consisted of show tunes.

The first show we saw in London also happened to be my absolute favorite musical in which the soundtrack ignited the spark of passion for theatre, and then seeing the live show poured gallons of gasoline over it, setting my heart on fire. I don't know if everyone can relate to having watched something that they love so much that it practically hurts because it's so beautiful. Regardless, that's how I feel watching a performance of *Wicked*. I found the show when I was fourteen, and I dreamed of playing Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West. I went so far as to memorize the blocking, the dialogue, and when the audience generally laughs.

AIFS had planned an activity for our group to see *Wicked*, and we sat on the floor in the center section. I'd seen the show many times already, including at the Gershwin Theatre in New York. The Apollo Victoria Theatre in London was all green inside. The carpet, seats, you name it, it looked like this theater was built to house this show. I was in such a hurry to get there because I hadn't seen it in a year and the theatre waits for no one. Neither do I. Over the years, I've discovered that I become a different person when I'm in a theater watching a performance, especially when it's a show I feel a strong connection to. I'm so willing to give myself over to

the story to go on that journey with the cast that I get angry when other people disturb me as I'm trying to watch. The same goes when I'm trying to get to the building. If I didn't know that I was goal-oriented before, all I needed to do was try to get myself to a theater on time.

Seeing *Wicked* for the ninth time brought me to tears as usual, and I gained a new understanding of the story. I was suddenly more aware of the political plotline. I cared about the political themes, and understood them, much more than I did at any previous age. I recognized the dangers in Oz associated with the Wizard's bending the truth and silencing certain groups. The characters who encourage others to speak



out get punished. It hit me what was at stake not only for Elphaba, but for all Ozians; the story is bigger than she. This environment is a powder keg ready to burst under a corrupt wizard who tries to unite everyone under a common enemy. It got too real too quickly. I left the theater wanting to reread every line of dialogue and lyric to process my new feelings. And that is why I love the theatre; after seeing a show nine times, I can still find something new.

After the Globe, this theater was the one I was most excited to see.

I had a similar experience when we saw *Romeo and Juliet* at the Globe. This was my third time watching a live performance of this play. My theatergoing experience was authentic in the sense that we saw a matinee performance like people would have five hundred years ago because they didn't have electricity. The director's concept for this production was more jarring than I expected; I was expecting a classical performance, since we were at Shakespeare's Globe, but this production took a lot of what I knew about *Romeo and Juliet* and turned it on its head.

For example, the makeup choices the creative team made appeared to be a hybrid of clown, mime, and *commedia dell'arte*, which I certainly hadn't ever envisioned using with this play, so I knew I was in for a production of *Romeo and Juliet* unlike one I'd seen before.

On the way to the Globe, our group passed Miranda sitting on the curb, eating a popsicle, who suggested that we take water to the show since it was so hot out. Her suggestion quickly turned into a warning and then a full-blown prophecy straight out of a Greek tragedy. I'm looking back with dramatic irony now, as I did not take Miranda's words as a foreshadowing of events to come.

As I previously mentioned, this show was not at all how I pictured *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo almost looked more like Hamlet to me with his depressed state and gothic black attire. But I felt that he was authentically playing the part of an angsty sixteen-year-old. Why then was Juliet about three times older than she's supposed to be? I did not believe she was thirteen, even with all the makeup. Her voice just sounded older, but she made the interesting choice to play Juliet as an awkward teenager rather than a stoic serious character. As I was writing my travel journal that night, still frustrated over this age thing, I realized:

Okay can you imagine if this play was done with a sixteen and thirteen-year-old actors?

People would flip out! It would be accurate, but it would have to be incredibly jarring to watch children give these speeches filled with allusions to sex and suicide and them eventually committing suicide. That would certainly be a statement. And it would make the play more tragic- unveiling the true tragedy within the play. The fact that they were children.

The director decided to place the act break after the fight scene between Romeo and Tybalt, which is also when some mild heat exhaustion set in for me. We happened to be in

London in the middle of a U.K. heatwave and a heat advisory had been issued that day. I didn't think much of it, because it felt like any other summer day in Indiana. But it was so hot the actors' face paint looked like it was melting. It was dripping off their faces, on their hands, clothes, other people, and just smudged in general. I wasn't worried about my makeup smearing, just remaining conscious. During Romeo's and Tybalt's duel, I noticed my dress was soaked. Sure, there was sweat running down my face because we were in the sun in an open-air theater for about two hours. But it just felt as though a fever had broken and my dress chose to absorb it. I only panicked once my vision became distorted. To this day, I don't remember how that act ended. I mean, I know what happens plot-wise, but I have no idea what it looked like to the audience.

This production did something that I'd never seen in a Shakespeare performance: split scenes. There would be multiple mini scenes happening on different parts of the stage simultaneously. I think it was successful at showing the chaos and rapid speed of events. It's easy to forget that everything happens so quickly over those few days, which is also why it's so tragic. Romeo and Juliet get caught up in a storm with no way out. The characters' lives aren't on pause just because they aren't in a scene. When reading the play, Romeo kills Tybalt then the scene shifts to Juliet at home, waiting for Romeo, giving her "gallop apace" speech. This production showed both events occurring simultaneously, which made me feel for the characters more. Watching Juliet yearn for Romeo and watching the Prince banish Romeo at the same time gave the audience a sense of dramatic irony that is not as easily replicated when simply reading the text. As a theatre teacher, I thought about how I hadn't considered how important pacing is in *Romeo and Juliet* and how the miscommunications contribute to the rapid escalation of events, which I certainly want to highlight when teaching this play.

The play got darker after the intermission. I had even more questions about this interpretation. The scene that struck me the most was when Romeo leaves the apothecary, played by Lady Capulet in this production. Instead of poison, the apothecary gave Romeo a gun. As Romeo went through a long speech about not wanting to live without Juliet, the rest of the characters lined up towards the back of the stage in a formation of two rows. The front row consisted of the Capulet and Montague parents. During Romeo's speech about wanting to kill himself, he walked up to each parent and shot them. Each victim, wearing all black, gracefully knelt down and bowed their head. After that, he entered the Capulet tomb to find Juliet and they both died for real.

Our group had lots of speculation as to whether these murders of Romeo's and Juliet's parents were symbolic of burying the Capulet and Montague parents' strife, or if Romeo literally buried it because there's no one left to fight. This production also cut out the epilogue where the surviving parents, because only Lady Montague dies, reconcile and decide to build statues to honor their children. My interpretation was that Romeo killed all four parents before entering the tomb. But if I were in charge of directing a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, I don't think I would have thought to do this. Friar Lawrence and the Nurse make it seem that the parents are the only ones that have a problem with Romeo and Juliet being together, but the parents don't even find out about their hidden relationship until after Romeo and Juliet die. I interpreted this production's ending of the play to mean that the only way to restore peace in Verona was for the Montague-Capulet feud to end, and the only way the feud could end was through their deaths. Overall, this production challenged a lot of my preconceived notions about *Romeo and Juliet* and about what seeing theatre at the Globe is like.

When we saw *Twelfth Night* at the Globe, I had a similar experience of my expectations being overturned. We were true groundlings and stood for the duration of the performance right up by the stage and I was thankful for my shoe inserts. This also was not an authentic, Elizabethan production like Shakespeare would have seen. There were modern musical numbers inserted throughout the show. Sometimes the actors sang their dialogue, and as someone who loves musical theatre, I was on board with that. Everything was so bright and sparkly and loud, I felt more like I went to a music festival than a Shakespeare performance. Perhaps the theatre artists made those choices because we're assuming this is what it would've felt like for theatregoers in Shakespeare's day. If that was the case with both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*, then I think that's what Shakespeare would have wanted for his modern audiences, and I'm certainly not going to argue with the bard.

For the longest time, I thought that it would be difficult to find a play or musical that I didn't enjoy watching. Then came *The Woman in Black*. This play was memorable to me in terms of how scared I was. This was one of the group activities that we could participate in during our free time, such as watching the performance of *Wicked*. I knew this was a scary story since there's a horror film and a novel version. But I figured that since this was one of the group ticket blocks, we would be up in the nosebleed section and we'd be so far away that I'd feel distanced enough from the horror.

This was a small theater and I don't even think there was a balcony. I thought, "Okay, so we're sitting on the floor. That's okay, we're still towards the back although that's not that far from the stage anyway. But there's still that fourth wall and that's probably made of brick, so we'll still be separated." All of that was wrong. But at least I knew it was supposed to be scary; the two women sitting next to me did not realize that this was supposed to be frightening and did

not handle being scared well. Thank goodness I had my friend Kaelyn sitting next to me, on the aisle, otherwise I don't know what I would have done.

The stage version of *The Woman in Black* is structured as a play within a play. The old man, Arthur Kipps, wants to tell his story about his encounters with the Woman in Black. Arthur hires a young actor to play him for a performance of this play for his family. The rehearsals show the actor, as a young Arthur, living out his story of the Woman in Black. And along the way there are creepy shadows, suspense, and a terrifying woman wearing black scaring the characters and audience members alike.

This was one of the few instances in my life where I didn't feel safe in the theater watching a play. The Woman in Black entered from the back of the audience and I flinched when I saw her through my peripheral vision. I mean, she was about two feet away from me and if she entered from the audience, who's to say she wouldn't reappear out there again? Throughout the show, the lights would flicker or go out completely and no one ever knew where she was. No one was safe and there was nowhere to hide. I realized later that the production team probably made this choice to put the audience in the same position as the actor. I was just as frightened by watching her haunt the man without fearing for my own life. I don't think I was adequately prepared for this play.

There were many loud noises and piercing screams of bloody murder that made me jump out of my seat and closer to Kaelyn. I held her hand for most of the show and I'm amazed I didn't end up sitting in her lap by the end. She was such a sweetheart and let me squeeze her hand with all my force, as I whispered various obscenities to myself any time someone screamed or when the Woman in Black would suddenly appear six inches behind the main character. I'm pretty sure by the end of the show I was shaking, and Kaelyn could feel it. After the show,

Kaelyn told me that she saw the actress get into position for her first entrance, so she kept checking around the theater to warn me if the Woman in Black was near. That would've been a nice thing to mention during the intermission. I spent half the time just hoping she wouldn't come up behind me because I hate not being aware of what's going on behind me, especially since we didn't know when this woman would strike next.

As if that weren't frightening enough, at the end of the show when the men have finally finished rehearsing the play, the actor says to Arthur something along the lines of "Oh what an excellent show we've got, sir! And it was so good on your part to hire that young actress to come dressed in all black to lurk around and scare me." Then the old man says, "I didn't see a young woman." Blackout. Show's over. Bows. To make matters worse, that actress isn't credited in the program, nor does she bow. Instead she appears onstage with one garish spotlight shining on her face and nothing else. Then we had to go home realizing that we were just as disturbed as the young actor and were probably going to be haunted. This is probably the one show I should've starting drinking during Act I to calm down. But we made it back to our rooms without bringing the Woman in Black, or at least that's what we thought.

Prior to watching this play, I had never experienced this type of fear in a theater. I don't even watch scary movies or read scary stories, because I don't like being scared. I knew that theatre was all about accessing one's emotions, and that it's a visceral art form, but this may as well have been psychological warfare. I thought the acting and the production elements were well-executed, nonetheless. Knowing how the events play out, I would see it again (but I'd probably still want a friend with me). I'm not sure my twenty-year-old self was thinking that on the walk back from the theater. The point is that I learned that I can brave this kind of fear and I was not permanently scarred by the performance.

The last show I saw in London, I think, was the perfect way to end our Shakespeare experience. Elizabeth, Mary, and I went to *Sh!t Faced Shakespeare*. We learned that before each performance, one member of the cast gets drunk and the rest of the sober actors have to play the scenes around whatever random words or actions the intoxicated actor decides to incorporate. We saw *Much Ado About Nothing* with a drunk Claudio. I thought it was only appropriate that I should drink at this performance, to accurately connect with the context of the show.

There was an emcee running the show who would interrupt every now and then. He showed us how much alcohol, and the different types, the actor drank before the show. How that actor was still conscious, let alone walking or reciting Shakespeare, I don't know. The emcee then gave one audience member a gong and one a horn which they could play one time and he'd bring the actor another drink. The action would pause while Claudio downed another drink and the scene would resume from where they left off. Talk about seeing a company of talented actors who worked well together. These actors improvised rhyming couplets based on Claudio's drunken slurs. I'm not sure what the lesson of this show was. I think it was: Shakespeare is even funnier when you're drunk.

In all seriousness, though, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on how well-versed one would have to be in Shakespeare to perform it while drunk. Memorizing all the lines is difficult enough, and any sort of mishap can happen during a given performance. Actors struggle to cover mistakes even when their scene partner isn't stumbling across the stage asking where his hat is or whining that the stage manager took his sword away. Improv is trickier than the folks on *Whose Line is it Anyway?* make it seem. When I think about our company of actors forming a community centered on *Twelfth Night*, I don't think we were quite at the level of expertise to perform the scenes drunk; but to be fair, we never tested that.

How Austentatious

High on my list of independent travel ventures was to experience as much Jane Austen as I could in England. My best friend, Brittany, describes me as a Jane Austen junkie. Truth be told, I could have spent those three weeks following Austen around England. I decided that if I only saw one thing pertaining to her, I wanted to go to the Jane Austen Centre in Bath. It hits several birds with one stone: I got to see a museum in a city she actually lived in—*Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* are set in Bath—and I got to see a part of England that wasn't London.

My deep love for Jane Austen flourished in the class I took that spring, "Legacy of Jane Austen," taught by, you guessed it, Ms. Dalton. I had the most fun reading Austen's novels, learning about her life, and interacting with a group of women who shared my interests in the work. We discussed the misconceptions about her work; people think the novels are fluffy without much real substance, but in reality, she makes so many biting social commentaries. She's such a witty, sassy lady and I found myself connecting with that. I think we'd be good friends if we met, personally. I did take an online quiz asking which classic novelist was my soulmate and sure enough, Jane Austen was the answer.

I became invested in her story, one we don't know much about, and when my class read a biography about Austen, I cried because in the end she dies. Okay, I know that that's how a lot of biographies of people who lived two centuries ago end, but it just hit me how horrible her final days were. It devastated me that she lived half as long as everyone else in her family and that we could have had so many more books. I was sad that she never got to marry someone she loved. I cried in our living room because I had the sudden realization that I will never meet Jane Austen. I will never get to tell her how much her work means to me or how much she's changed my life.

I was the same age as her heroines, and I was also trying to navigate the world and find my place in it. I just had a lot more options and freedoms in the society I lived in.

One of my roommates, Zi, and I planned a trip for Friday, June 23. Zi had never read anything by Jane Austen. She just wanted to see the city and gladly volunteered to be my travel companion. I think you'll come to find that she is the real hero of this story. She listened to me go on and on about each of the books, why I liked each one, and what I was most excited to see. We were quite travel savvy and planned our own trip by bus from London to Bath. It's about three hours to get there by bus and we had to wake up before six to make it in time. We also wanted to maximize our time there since this was only going to be a day trip, so we sucked it up and got to the Victoria station with zero caffeine in our systems.

I thought I would be a true fangirl and read *Emma* on the way there, but I was so tired I fell asleep. I figured at least then I was more rested and able to take in the city once we got there. When we arrived in Bath it was everything I expected it to be. It looked just as I imagined it would, with the old buildings and roads. We even drove by one of the places in which the Austens lived during their time in Bath. I guess Bath is known for vicious seagulls; at least that's the impression I got from the lady who came up to us and warned us about seagulls swooping down attacking people for food. I didn't remember that part of Austen's novels, but I kept a watchful eye. We walked rather quickly as the Google Maps lady directed us towards the Jane Austen Centre.

I would describe my thoughts, feelings, and actions upon arriving at the Jane Austen Centre to be like those of a small child entering the Magic Kingdom at Disney World for the first time. Except, Disney World doesn't hold a candle to the Jane Austen Centre. I was fully aware that this was not the actual Kitty Bennet who asked me what my favorite novel was; this was

probably a woman my age, studying at university, working during the summer. But I thought she was fabulous. I got so excited when she, and everyone else working there, told me she loved my Jane Austen T-shirt with all her books on it. I told her my favorite Austen novel was *Emma*, already feeling the onset of tears of excitement. Kitty Bennet said, "How interesting, we don't get a lot of *Emma*. Mostly *Pride and Prejudice*." I knew I was overflowing with excitement because I thought to myself, "And *Pride and Prejudice* is the book Kitty's in and she just referenced it. It's like the character is self-aware." That didn't surprise me that most people say *Pride and Prejudice* was their favorite, as *Pride and Prejudice* is a close second favorite. The working list at that time of my rankings of the novels was *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion*, *Sense and Sensibility*.

Emma was my favorite novel mostly because it felt so different from the others. Not only did Austen give readers a heroine with money, but she knew that people weren't going to like Emma very much. And Austen still wrote Emma the way she liked her. The indirect narration shows the book almost through Emma's eyes, but not completely; and I think that helps humanize her to readers who are not instantly fond of her. If we saw the book only from Emma's perspective, I think we would easily get annoyed with her. Or if we read the book from only a third person perspective, we would lack the insights into Emma's thinking that give context for her actions. When I read *Emma*, I thought I had Austen figured out. I thought I knew exactly how this novel would unfold, based on the three Austen novels I'd already read, and then Austen threw me a curveball. I saw why people revered it as Austen's best work, and from that point on it was my favorite.

We got to the Jane Austen Centre at the perfect time, about an hour after it opened, because there weren't any other people there on a Friday morning. So, Fanny Price led Zi and me

on a personal tour through the museum. While we waited for her, there were Jane Austen coloring sheets and quizzes for us to pass the time; I put those in my purse for later. Zi told every person we encountered, "She's the biggest Jane Austen fan ever." That gets you a lot of attention when that's announced in a Jane Austen museum. I smiled the biggest smile I'd ever given because it was the truth. When Fanny gave us the spiel about the Austen family's backstory, I kept thinking that I already knew all this from class. Thanks, Ms. Dalton!

We walked through the museum and started by looking at the only portraits we have of Jane Austen. The portrait done by her sister Cassandra usually hangs in the National Portrait Gallery, which I visited, but it was removed it to be sent somewhere else for the 200th anniversary of her death on July 18, 2017. But, it's widely debated as to what Jane Austen really looked like. She died before the invention of photography, and it is said that Cassandra's portrait doesn't do her justice. Either way, I was just glad to be this close to Austen.

Before I get into the story that makes me look even crazier than I have up to this point, I'd like to give a shout out to Zi for being such a great photographer during the experience of a lifetime for me. She literally was at the museum for me, so I gave her my phone and she got some of the best candid pictures of me feeling all the feelings. I won't pretend that I was even slightly calm or composed. But I wasn't thinking about how crazy I looked; I only cared about connecting with Austen. I chalk up all the crazy to the excitement of being in England or being tired because travel is exhausting. But I might also just have a problem. I get attached to stories easily and I obsess hardcore.

We walked around the costumes from various adaptations of Austen's novels and I should mention that the 1995 BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice* is my favorite Austen adaptation. While *Emma* is my favorite novel, I will always be a Lizzy Bennet at heart and Mr.

Darcy holds a special place in my heart. Colin Firth *is* Mr. Darcy. I love Colin Firth, I love Mr. Darcy, and I especially love Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy. I realize that's not a very unique view, but that doesn't mean it isn't true. At the end of the costume exhibit we came across a wax figure of Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy. I wrote in my travel journal, "I was not mentally prepared for this, despite my efforts. No one said anything about being inches from Mr. Darcy. MR. DARCY."

Not only was I able to get pictures with Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy, but I got to dress up. I chose the white empire-waisted dress with blue flowers because it reminded me the most of Elizabeth Bennet, or at least Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet. Kitty tied me into the dress and she and Fanny told me that I really worked the blue bonnet that popped the flowers on the dress. They said, "And not everybody can do that, but you look good in it. You really do belong in Regency England!" Cue the tears. I think my excitement started to look like shock and they were worried that I would faint. How appropriate. It could've been just like *Love and Freindship*, minus the carriage accident. I don't know if I would've ever lived down passing out at the Jane Austen Centre because I got to take a picture with the wax figure of Colin Firth. This wasn't even a real person. It's not like Colin Firth himself was standing there.

The "peak of my entire existence," as I described it, happened when we made our way into the next room. I'll let you read my twenty-year-old self's frenzied journal entry for this one:

You walk around the door THERE SHE IS JANE AUSTEN. I looked into her glass hazel eyes and she looked back at me and I just lost it. It was like walking on air. I actually cried, and I feel like we were able to look into each other's' souls. Like, I'm well aware that it was a wax figure, and it may not even be what she looked like, but I truly felt like we had a connection, as crazy as that may sound. And they told me we looked alike and are of similar heights. And through quiet muffled tears, I said 'I love that we both have

the bangs going on!’ I remembered back in class when we were reading the biography and I felt genuinely sad at the end because I will never get to meet her, never get to tell her how much her work means to me, how much she means to me. Now I can say that I think she knows. Again, it was just a wax figure, but I like to believe she stood there symbolically for the real Jane Austen.



This was my level of excitement the entire time we were in the Jane Austen Centre.

When my friend Leah and I were trying to find sources for our final essay in our Austen class, Leah suggested we hold a seance to see if we couldn’t communicate with Austen herself about her thoughts on her work. We didn’t end up doing that. But again, I felt as though I communicated with her as I looked into those glass eyes and she looked back into my real eyes. And I didn’t even have to mess with the supernatural. As I stood there breathing heavily, in awe of this entire experience, Fanny said she’d just give the two of us a moment alone and then

backed away slowly. Just me and Jane Austen alone in this Georgian house, staring into each other’s souls.

Sometimes I think we can forget that these famous, old, dead authors were real people. She’s been dead for two hundred years and we still don’t have a lot of connections or information about her life. I found it interesting that at no point during my time in the Jane Austen Centre



Yes, I am crying in this picture.

did someone mention how Austen hated Bath. The popular story is that Austen, who was unmarried and had to rely on her parents for financial support, fainted upon hearing that her family was moving to Bath. Also, the staff referred to her as “Jane,” whereas I was used to calling her “Austen.” It threw me off. I don’t know if I’ll ever be on a first name basis with her. Being in that museum reminded me that she was, in fact, real. She existed and was a woman just like me, perhaps with similar bangs, who wrote these books I spent a semester studying and will spend a lifetime loving.

I calmed down a little bit when we sat at writing desks to practice writing letters. I thought I was really good with a quill. Okay, it was a fountain pen with a feather at the end, but it felt authentic. If I were to write someone a letter in the style of Jane Austen, who I would write it to? The answer was quite simple. I composed a letter in purple ink for Ms. Dalton to bring her in August. This letter was maybe three sentences, but she told me it was the perfect thing I could have brought her. She hung it up on her bulletin board in her office. I wished that our class could have been there with me. After spending a semester together studying the books, this would have been the most epic field trip.



To cap off the experience of being in Jane Austen’s Bath, we went to the Regency Tea Room. I drank about four cups of peppermint tea and felt as though my seven-year-old self’s dreams came true. At this tea party, though, I wasn’t wearing heels that were too big, long strings of pearls, or carrying a purse that only had lipstick in it. I think nearly all her dreams had come true by this point. All she needed was to become a teacher, marry a Prince

Charming (now she’s upgraded to a Mr. Darcy), and have kids and a house that looks like the

ones I clipped from magazines more than a decade ago. During our real grown-up tea party, I did come down from the emotional high brought about by being immersed in Regency England and had time to reflect on the day's adventures.

In Spring 2016 I read my first Jane Austen novel, *Northanger Abbey*. By Summer 2017, I had read all the books, taken an entire class on Jane Austen, visited the Jane Austen Centre, and drunk tea in the Regency Tea room while gazing at the portrait of Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy above the fireplace. Reading Austen's novels was the first time I truly discovered how multifaceted literature can be. Within one novel, she tackles issues of class and money, politics, gender, all while giving us a timeless romance that gets tied up with a bow at the conclusion. Austen's understanding of the human condition is on par with Shakespeare's. We can find examples of her characters represented in modern literature and society, as a result. Austen reminds me why I love reading, which is perhaps the greatest gift an author can give her readers.

Stratford-upon-Avon is the Dollywood of England

The day after my Jane Austen adventures was our group's day trip to Stratford-upon-Avon, as we hadn't had enough of William Shakespeare up to this point. Can you really have too much Shakespeare, though? We had seen the site where his theater stood centuries ago and stood on the stage of the rebuilt Globe. Now we were going to see where he lived, wrote, and was buried. I remember hearing about Stratford-upon-Avon in every class where I had to study a Shakespeare play. I hadn't ever heard the town referenced in regard to anything or anyone other than Shakespeare, though. It turns out, the town, at least from the perspective I got on our Shakespearean tour of Stratford, is all about Shakespeare all the time. I'm not joking when I say that the stores and restaurants are named after him. Will Shakes is a milkshake place and we saw a restaurant called The Food of Love, referencing one of our group's favorite lines from *Twelfth Night*.

Our first stop was Anne Hathaway's cottage. Anne Hathaway as in Mrs. Shakespeare—not the 21st century actress playing Meryl Streep's assistant, just in case we needed some clarification there. At Mrs. Shakespeare's cottage, the stone floors were the same ones from the 1500s, so we literally walked where William and Anne walked centuries ago. No, that sounded weird; I don't think I'm on a first name basis with them, either. Where the Shakespeares walked centuries ago.

We saw the boys' room that the children, and possibly servants, would have had to share. Everything was kept in its original state, as evident by the low door frames that anyone nearing six feet would have had to duck under. We also saw the ancient laundry room where servants or Mrs. Shakespeare could've washed Mr. Shakespeare's clothes. And we saw a bed that may have been made from part of Shakespeare's second-best bed that he left his wife when he died. There

was so much history in this small building and I couldn't believe that thirteen generations of Hathaways lived there until 1911. What a legacy to have associated with your family's house. All my parents have at their house is a note my dad wrote on the wall behind the oven saying that he didn't put that hole in the wall or chip the paint when they were installing the new microwave.



Sitting on a bench outside Anne Hathaway's cottage.

We also visited Shakespeare's birthplace and by that I truly mean his birth place. We saw the room, practically the exact spot where he was born in his parents' bedroom. We also saw the birth windows, or at least part of them, where many famous visitors signed their names. One of the guys working there told us that not everyone knows this, but young Shakespeare could have caught the plague as an infant and easily died. He was his parents' first child to survive through early childhood. And then he asked us, "What would've happened to English literature?" That troubled me. Some of the possible answers we came up with were that Christopher Marlowe rises above all or Milton becomes the Shakespeare, neither of which satisfied me. Also, am I the only one that finds it weird to think of Shakespeare as a toddler? In my head he was always an adult playwright. Either way, I'm glad he survived and wrote so many plays. Otherwise, I'd be forced to read the ones he ripped off if I wanted to know the stories. But would I even be aware of those stories if there were no Shakespeare? You can see why the initial question was so puzzling.

This same guide also told us that some former U.S. presidents were said to have visited Shakespeare's birthplace, including John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and maybe Dwight D.

Eisenhower, “if there was free time during World War II.” Something tells me he was a little preoccupied during World War II, but all right. Since Adams and Jefferson supposedly visited as well, does that mean I’ve also lived out *Hamilton*? It’s interesting to think about how Shakespeare’s work and his influence had to travel across continents, over the Atlantic, to show up in the United States. I knew, obviously, that he lived in England and that I lived in the U.S., but it didn’t click in my brain that it would’ve taken much longer for his work to reach this country. Associating Americans, especially those who founded America, with Shakespeare, is like two separate worlds colliding. Yet now everyone in America and Britain alike has at least heard the name William Shakespeare. Even if they can’t tell you anything about his work, I assume they recognize the name.

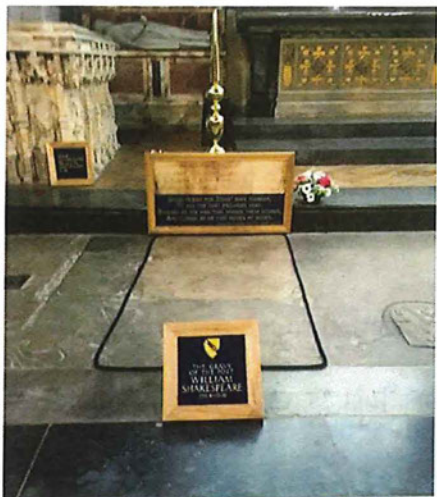
It’s a dangerous thing to let a group of Shakespeare students loose in the gift shop at Shakespeare’s birthplace. Zoe, Lexi, and I, each playing Olivia in our scene, all bought the ring which is a copy of one found when the Rose Theatre was dug up. The Rose was like the Globe, only Shakespeare didn’t write for it; so, it represents his competition. But in the context of Elizabethan theatre, both were important. The writing on the ring translates to, “Think of me, God willing.” No one knows whose ring it was or why it was lost. I wore the band on my left middle finger and felt connected to the Elizabethans. Queen Elizabeth II ruled England in 2017, so technically I was also living in Elizabethan England.

We also took a walking tour through Stratford and attempted to piece together the timeline of Shakespeare’s life. The first thing we saw was the church where his parents were married. We also saw the school where he went as a child and recited Latin all the livelong day. Apparently, back in the day the way school was done made students better at memorizing than we are today. This explained how later actors were able to learn a bunch of Shakespearean roles

to play a different one each night. There's also a theory that since we don't know exactly what Shakespeare was doing for a few years during the middle of his life that he was a teacher and taught at the school he attended. I personally liked that theory, because I was studying to be a teacher and then Shakespeare and I would be doing the same work. All I'd need to do is perfect my iambic pentameter and we'd basically be the same person. There's also the theory that he joined the navy and saw the world, which could explain why he wrote about so many places outside of England. The fact that he could write about so many places that he supposedly never saw is astounding to me. I'm trying to write right now about places I actually saw, and I can't imagine trying to explain what a place was like if I'd never been there.

During the real estate portion of our tour, we saw the house where Shakespeare's daughter Susanna lived, and her daughter Elizabeth. We also saw where his daughter Judith lived with her husband. But now their house is a store that sells bath stuff. Near Susanna's brown house was a garden where Shakespeare's fancy house in Stratford was once he became a well-to-do playwright. But the big fancy house isn't there anymore because centuries later, long after Shakespeare's death, this other guy was living in the house and everyone knew who Shakespeare was. According to our temporary tour guide, people would just come up to his door and say, "Oh is this where Shakespeare lived? Can we come inside?" I guess this resident didn't care for that, so one night he had his house burned to the ground. Well, the townspeople were so outraged that the only solution they could think of was to run him out of Stratford with pitchforks.

Our final stop was Holy Trinity Church where Shakespeare is buried. It's an absolutely gorgeous church and the Shakespeares are buried by their own altar. From left to right across the floor we saw Anne Hathaway, William Shakespeare, Thomas Nash (his granddaughter Elizabeth's husband), John Hall (his daughter Susanna's husband), and Susanna. The



Shakespeare's remains at Holy Trinity Church.

Shakespeare family was lying at our feet. We were in the same room as Shakespeare's bones, or at least what was left of them, that he curses anyone from moving. They were going to move his remains to Westminster Abbey, along with all the other famous Brits' remains, but he was apparently quite adamant that he stay put. There were also copies of the baptism and death records with his name on them, but no birth records.

This day trip brought us closer to a different aspect of Shakespeare's legacy than we'd spent the previous weeks studying. I had a similar feeling in Stratford experiencing Shakespeare's legacy to what I felt in Bath with Jane Austen's legacy; I think that we, or at least I, can forget that Shakespeare was a real person. He had a life and did mundane things like everyone else, while casually revolutionizing English theatre and literature in the process. He walked across those stone floors of the cottage each day and probably spent a decent portion of his afternoon wondering what was for dinner that night and had to deal with his kids asking if they could get a puppy. It's like we hold his work in such a high regard that it just magically appeared or was sent down from angels. But he was a human being, just like the rest of us. I've said it before, and I'll say it again that his grasp of humanity preserves his work.

Shakespeare tells us through his plays that we shouldn't underestimate what young people can do. As someone who wants to teach young adults, I'm saying that we should give teenagers the credit they deserve. They can understand Shakespeare because they know what it means to be a human. The language is complex, no doubt, but once they find a meaningful connection to their lives, it starts to make sense. Sure, society is a little different now, but in a lot

of ways it's similar to what Shakespeare experienced and wrote about. If our societies weren't similar, we wouldn't have all these popular adaptations of his plays to stream on Netflix. Those directors, actors, and writers didn't start out with a perfect understanding of Shakespeare; I'd argue that no one has a perfect understanding of Shakespeare. In that case, I want to encourage my students to run with their imperfect understandings of Shakespeare through performance, writing, directing, designing, etc., and develop their own opinions, just as my theatre teachers encouraged me to do.

Julia's Character ARC

Right after our performance of *Twelfth Night*, we had a reflection with Miranda and Jo about the Globe program. They had us each write down an ARC—accomplishment, regret, and a challenge for the future to read aloud for the group. I was proud that I was able to take ownership of the text and make interpretive choices. I was proud of myself for realizing that that's allowed; Shakespeare doesn't have to be this inaccessible thing that only a select few can understand. I felt like I was speaking my words during the performance and grew in terms of my agency as a thespian. That's also a testament to his writing, how he tried to be human and make it accessible to his audience, and subsequently our audiences in the 21st century.

My regret was that I didn't put myself out there more and be braver. I was more reserved and shy during this program than I was at school. I think that day, during the reflection specifically, was the first time that I actually used my usual wit. On the last day I was unapologetically myself and presented my true self without fear. I wanted to have gotten to that place a lot sooner. I was getting sad partially because I was being my own worst enemy and partially because the experience was over; I made friends that I could very well never see again. After stating this revelation, I started to cry. Who's surprised? Miranda told me I would be missed, which just prompted the tears to turn into mini sobs. To try to lighten the mood Miranda said, "Never mind, leave! If that helps you." I laughed and pretended to jump up from my seat and head for the door, "No, stay," she said. At least I left some sort of mark on this place and the people there, both of which certainly impacted me.

I said that my challenge was to write my thesis and synthesize all that I've learned from traveling abroad and write the freaking book. My long-term challenge, as written in my travel journal, was to take all these experiences and lessons in, so I can be a good theatre teacher. I

want to teach my students about the importance of space and that the audience isn't something to be ignored; take them on the journey with you. Take them on a journey the way Shakespeare took me on a three-week journey in England. I'm sure I'll realize even more about how great this learning opportunity was in helping me figure out how to teach Shakespeare once I'm actually in a classroom trying to teach Shakespeare.

To wrap up our time at the Globe, we had a drinks reception after our performance and reflection. There was no doubt that I was an adult now. Being at a social gathering with free wine that I didn't have to ask permission to drink? Yup, that's pretty grown-up. That white wine was so good, I could've drunk it like water. I didn't, though, because that would've been irresponsible.

After taking a selfie with Miranda, she asked me what my plans were after university. I told her I wanted to be a teacher for older grades because I have a lot of sass that I use on a general basis and I think they would be able to take it, and I already expected they would be throwing it at me. The consensus I came to was that the students would either hate me or think I'm crazy. Miranda said, "That's a good plan. If they can't like you, they can be afraid." It was a great, albeit brief, conversation with her. I thanked her for everything and we determined that we couldn't go on telling each other nice things or I'd cry. Then she'd cry. But we both knew the sentiments were there.

I still had two days left in England, but as we headed back to our dorm I had such an urge to cry. Not a few tears, either. I mean like a faucet-- a faucet so overcome with emotions all it can do is leak. But I triumphantly noted in my travel journal, "I held it together like an adult." We walked away from the Globe for the last time, right when it became so familiar and typical to

wake up every morning knowing I'd spend the day at Shakespeare's Globe. Still holding back my tears I wrote, "I just realized that so many lasts happened today, and I got sad." I've known since high school that I think I'm bad at introductions and goodbyes, but I'm so good at everything in the middle.



Who would want to leave this group of goofy thespians?

To cheer me up, my friend Valerie suggested we go to Burger King since the chicken tenders reminded me of home. As I sat so pensively in a London Burger King, I realized that I was back where I started at the end of the previous summer, wondering what comes next. I asked, "What was my next long-term goal, other than my thesis, or maybe is it just my thesis?" That fear of the unknown crept in and all I knew was that I did not want to go home and work the rest of the summer, especially when I knew how spectacular England is and how much I'd like to be back at college with my friends to tell them about my adventures.

Learning to Walk on My Own

During my initial outlining and note-taking process of writing a travel memoir based on my three trips to Europe, I kept thinking about how fictional characters never travel somewhere without a purpose. They're not leaving home just for the sake of a change of scenery, as the author has carefully chosen plans for them. I also didn't travel without a purpose. My purposes for travel varied slightly with each experience. My first trip overseas was for vacation; the second trip was a field study for my Honors class; and my third trip was to study abroad, specifically to study Shakespeare in England. Even when a character travels without making the conscious decision that they want to take a vacation or study abroad, there is still an underlying purpose. The author gives the character a lesson they must learn that they could not have done by staying at home. Everything that I have learned in Europe, whether it was listed in this memoir or not, I could not have learned by reading about Europe in my dorm room, for example.

Experience was the best teacher for me, in addition to my human teachers who guided me on each of my journeys. Following a variety of footsteps through Europe prepared me to walk on my own and showed me that it's okay if I trip and fall. If I fall and scrape my knee, it doesn't mean that I'm bad at walking. Similarly, if I encounter a problem while traveling it doesn't mean that I'm a bad traveler. I have been walking for more than two decades, so it seems like such a basic skill now and I forget the struggles I endured to learn that skill. I have far less experience with travel, though. I couldn't put myself on a plane at seventeen and navigate three countries on my own (plus, my parents would not have allowed that). But after traveling abroad three times, each time with an increased degree of freedom and confidence, I learned that I can hold my own abroad.

When I confirmed my place in the Shakespeare's Globe Program, I decided to spend a week in Ireland visiting a family friend after finishing the program. Shortly after returning to the U.S. in the summer of 2017, I decided I wanted to complete my student teaching in Germany. I do not think that I would have become as ambitious or adventurous of a person had I not had these opportunities as a young adult-in-training. If I hadn't learned that I can navigate public transportation in London, for example, I would have been more nervous about making solo trips in Ireland. Had I not spent increasingly longer spans of time abroad, I would have been so scared at the idea of spending four months in Germany. I wasn't consciously thinking about how I grew in terms of my willingness to take on new challenges between 2014 to 2017. But a previously shy adolescent purposefully put herself out there, trusting that embracing the vulnerability associated with traveling somewhere new would be worth it.

Traveling abroad three times before age twenty-one taught me how true it is that we don't often realize the significance of living in the moment until it's over. I like to think that on some rare occasions during my travels I recognized the significance of the moment while I was experiencing it, such as walking outside Heathrow Airport into a foreign country for the first time, listening to Handel's *Messiah* with my Honors class, and standing on the stage of Shakespeare's Globe. I knew that simply being in Europe in high school and finally getting to see the Globe in college were moments that I'd been looking forward to for months, if not years. There were also unexpected moments of similar joy that I fondly look back on, moments that I couldn't believe were real, like the performance of Handel's *Messiah*. Now, even after writing this memoir, I look back on my experiences in Europe and they almost feel fictional.

If I didn't have the dirt stains on my shoes, the travel journals, and the thousands of pictures, I almost wouldn't believe that these adventures were real. Sometimes my stories about

walking through Europe feel like narratives that everyone who was involved agreed upon as the truth. I mean this in the best sense of an existential paradox. I'm so grateful that I had wonderful experiences that feel almost too good to be true. But I also wish that I could continue to relive those moments, just as they occurred. Part of my writer's journey with this memoir involved trying to recreate some of my strongest memories, so others could experience secondhand the incredible places I visited.

Perhaps there was some underlying motivation in writing this memoir to step into my mentors' shoes and be the leader. Maybe I was trying to make some metaphorical footprints on these pages, so readers could follow my footsteps as I describe my numerous adventures with the corresponding thoughts and feelings. I have yet to literally lead someone through Europe, but I like to think that I've metaphorically led those who have read this book through my version of Europe. The best part about having recorded my experiences is that I can relive these moments on the page as many times as I like. I can let my younger self lead my current and older selves down these familiar paths as a reminder of where I've been and provide reassurance that I have the capability to keep taking unfamiliar paths.

It seems redundant to say that my travels changed my life and that writing this memoir has been a life-changing experience, one that I will not recognize the full significance of for years. If travel and memoir writing taught me anything, it's that just when I think I've figured out all there is to know about something, especially myself, there's always another layer to peel back through self-reflection. I never want to stop traveling and I never want to stop growing. And now that I know how much I like both of those concepts, I won't let myself stop. I will slip my white shoes on and keep walking.

Annotated Bibliography

Gilbert, Elizabeth. *Eat, Pray, Love*. Penguin, 2006.

Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir was the most influential text I read throughout my research process. Since I also visited Italy, I connected most with her experiences in Rome. Specifically, I connected with her notion of wanting to explore her identity, in addition to exploring a physical place, because my thesis is a retrospective look at how I have changed as a result of traveling abroad. In terms of Gilbert's writing, the aspect that stood out most to me was her voice, especially how authentic, witty, and honest she is with her readers. I liked how her voice conveyed a tone similar to her actually telling me her stories and I want to replicate that authenticity in my work. In addition, I greatly admired her honesty about the positive and negative aspects of her travels. She tells the truth, which seems incredibly simple for a memoir, but it struck me and I appreciated how she did not try to overly romanticize her experiences because travel is not always glamorous.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Italian Journey*. Penguin, 1992.

Goethe's text was useful to me in that I found many things that I did not want to emulate in my travel memoir. While I could connect with visiting Italy, I did not have as strong of a connection with Goethe's visit as I did with Gilbert's visit to Italy. Goethe's accounts of his experiences were more superficial than I would have liked. He tells his story through letters and gives more of a play-by-play of the day's events. I found myself wanting him to explain the significance of these events and why he felt the need to record them. Reading this text led me to realize that I would have to dig deeper when analyzing my travels because I want to present the "so what" of my self-reflection. Goethe writes to his family and friends to share his stories, but I

am writing for myself, to analyze my experiences and create a narrative that explores my personal growth as a result of traveling abroad.

Kimmel, Haven. *A Girl Named Zippy*. Broadway Books, 2001.

I wanted to use Haven Kimmel's memoir as a mentor text, even though it is not a travel memoir, because it was a familiar text to use when teaching myself to read like a writer. Looking at this familiar text from the point of view of a writer highlighted many aspects of storytelling that I had been overlooking. Within this memoir, I thought a lot about the organization and how the stories are not told in chronological order, but that does not make it confusing for the reader. Since I have many dates associated with my travels, I want to make sure the reader has a clear timeline of when things are happening. Reading this text again gave me more to think about in terms of what overarching narrative I want to tell through the culmination of these smaller travel stories.

---. *She Got Up Off The Couch*. Free Press, 2006.

While reading Kimmel's second memoir, I focused on her representation of herself and other characters. Mostly, I focused on how she conveys her thoughts and voices of her younger self and her adult self reflecting on her younger self. With this in mind, I also thought about how she portrays everyone else in her stories from these two perspectives. I made connections to my experiences in that my current and previous selves have different voices and ways of thinking. I realize that the previous self I will be including in my travel memoir is only a couple of years younger than my current self, but I changed a lot over those three years and it is important to me to make those distinctions in my narration. I want to show the person I was before traveling and how each of my travels transformed me into a new person.

Lawson, Jenny. *Furiously Happy*. Flatiron Books, 2015.

Jenny Lawson's memoir is about her struggles with depression and anxiety, neither of which are facets of my memoir. While her subject matter is quite heavy, Lawson tells her stories from an open and frank perspective. She laughs at herself and invites the reader to laugh with her. Reading her memoir acted mainly as a way to boost my confidence as a writer and storyteller. I realized that if she could share these stories that are deeply personal and difficult to tell, then I can share my stories about traveling abroad and my accompanying thoughts and feelings. Lawson's memoir also fits within the theme I noticed of authors putting themselves in a vulnerable place by simply writing an authentic memoir and entrusting the reader with their stories. Again, this is something I admire and hope to accomplish in my project.

---. *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*. Amy Einhorn Books, 2012.

I read this memoir before reading *Furiously Happy*, and the first thing I noticed about Jenny Lawson's writing style is her unique voice and descriptions. Again, this is not a travel memoir; nevertheless, I found her storytelling influential. I could connect with Lawson's hyperboles and histrionics as she describes her younger self's thoughts and actions. I have a similar goal to present myself from three different ages and accurately tell my stories as my younger self experienced them, then explain how my older self thinks about them now. I also hope to entertain readers with my stories as Lawson's stories entertained me.

Mayes, Frances. *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Random House, 1996.

Frances Mayes' text describes her travels to Italy with the end goal in mind to set up a permanent residence there. Our travels differ in that sense because I knew I was only staying for a short period of time. Mayes describes the risks involved with an overseas home improvement project and uprooting her life in the United States. On a smaller scale, I connected with that

theme of risk-taking by traveling abroad, taking that step to leave behind what is familiar. Her writing style relied a lot on narrative summary, consisting of long, complex sentences. My goal in writing my travel memoir is to extend beyond just summarizing what I did each day and showing why those experiences were significant, why they were worth writing down and reflecting on later.

Mayle, Peter. *A Year in Provence*. Vintage, 1989.

Reading Peter Mayle's memoir about his time in France made me realize that my memories of France are not as concrete as the details he provides about his experiences. My stay was far shorter than Mayle's, and this text reiterated to me that I needed to reread my travel journal and look at the pictures I took to refresh my memory. Mayle bookends his memoir by reflecting on his year, which coincides with the reflection I will be doing throughout this process. He synthesizes each month's events into a chapter with immense amounts of sensory detail. While I think it is important for a writer to create a vivid picture for the reader, I found myself getting distracted by Mayle's longer descriptions. I wanted to focus more on the action of his story, which is also how I see myself writing my memoir.

---. *French Lessons*. Vintage, 2001.

As with Mayle's other text, I did not form as strong of connections as I did with other texts. The overarching theme of this memoir is food, which was different from how I wanted to organize my memoir; however, reading a text with a clear theme was helpful from a writing perspective. I found myself wondering if he had this theme in mind before writing this memoir, or if that came after. I did not have a theme in mind before embarking on my travels, or while I read this text, so I mainly focused on observing how this theme unified his stories. Mayle's writing style is similar to that of *A Year in Provence* and I had similar opinions regarding both

texts. Even so, I found Mayle's sensory details to be more effective in *French Lessons* because of his culinary theme.

Perrottet, Tony. *Pagan Holiday*. Random House, 2002.

Tony Perrottet's memoir mainly connected to my experiences in my Honors colloquium class, learning about Roman and Florentine history before visiting Italy. While this text is a travel memoir, to me it read almost more like a history book. There is an emphasis on the history of the places Perrottet visits, which he seems to give greater attention to in comparison to his personal experiences. This text felt more place-oriented, rather than self-oriented. I was looking for more explanation as to why these places were significant for Perrottet to write about. I want the focus of my writing to be on my experiences; I do not want my story to become overpowered by the place itself. I think it is important as a writer to provide context for the reader since they did not experience these stories first hand, but my goal is to find more of a balance between describing the place and describing the significance of my personal experiences.

Ricci, Felicia. *Unnaturally Green*. Felicia\Ricci, 2011.

While Felicia Ricci's memoir is not a travel memoir, I had read it several times prior to working on my thesis and I wanted to reread it to figure out why I liked her storytelling. She tells the story of her journey playing Elphaba in *Wicked* and goes further to explain the "so what" of this experience within the broader context of her life. This stuck out to me because I will obviously need to explain the significance of my travels to my life after arriving back in the United States. The aspect of Ricci's writing style that I found most inspiring is how she is unapologetically honest in her writing about all aspects of living out this dream. This has come up across multiple memoirs I read and, while it may be more challenging than I anticipate, I want to write with that same authenticity.

Walls, Jeannette. *The Glass Castle*. Scribner, 2005.

While Jeannette Walls' did not write this memoir as a travel memoir, I found myself making connections with her family moving and her personal growth. The more her family moved, the more I realized that this memoir is about Walls' journey of finding herself in various places. My travels were vastly different, but I could connect with Walls' resilience in the face of adversity and her overall courage on a smaller scale. Walls' memoir is based on her self-reflection regarding her coming of age experiences, which is precisely what my travel experiences were for me. She writes her thoughts from her past self's point of view and her reflections on her childhood from her adult perspective.

Wharton, Edith. *In Morocco*. HardPress Publishing, 2013.

This text was different from the others I read because Edith Wharton describes a place I have never visited, so making connections was a bit more difficult. It was not as easy for me to imagine the places she describes, partially because I have not visited them before and have less experience reading about Morocco as I do with western Europe. Regardless, I could still make connections to my own travels in that I am a woman traveling abroad to gain a broader worldview. Wharton writes her memoir more in the style of a guidebook, with a detailed history of these places and what travelers could see. She writes with a polished and professional tone, whereas I would like to write with a more casual, authentic voice that sounds like I am telling my story. I was more interested in reading what her personal experiences in these places were as opposed to what the extended history of the place was.